PARTISAN REVIEW

SUMMER, 1946

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GEORGE ORWELL
London Letter

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The Making of a Poem

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The "Liberal" Fifth Column

AN EDITORIAL

> "It is time that the United States awoke to the truth that nothing is gained for us vis-a-vis Russia by 'getting tough'."
> Editorial, *The New Republic*

THE NEW REPUBLIC proclaimed this oracular "truth" on April 22, 1946. Several weeks earlier the German Social Democrats in the Allied zones voted 7 to 1 against fusion with the Communists; the fusion was later forced in the Russian zone without any vote. Two weeks after the editorial appeared, the French people had administered a smashing defeat to the Communist Party by rejecting the proposed Constitution. The French referendum cannot be interpreted as a swing to the right, since many Socialists had voted no, against their own party leadership. Moreover the vote called out the 30 per cent absentees from the last election, who, had they been Rightists, could have voted for the parties of the Right at that time. The French people wanted democracy and their nose was keen enough to smell out the totalitarian odor of the Constitution; their referendum cannot be twisted to show any other meanings. Both French and German votes indicate that there are millions on the Continent with genuine democratic longings—even though many (for example, the French absentees) are not yet expressed completely by any party. If these democratic longings do not exist in Europe, we can write off European civilization right now; if they do exist, they will certainly not grow stronger by being fed the bread and water of a feeble American foreign policy. As long as American policy is weak and halting, the peoples of Europe will persist in believing that the United States intends to withdraw altogether from Europe, and they will gravitate helplessly—and under the threat of terror—into the Russian orbit.

Meanwhile in New York a journal which calls itself "liberal" is advocating a policy to sell out these millions into Stalinist slavery. When *The New Republic* published this editorial, it was actually helping to herd Social Democrats into concentration camps in Ger-

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many; helping to shoot democrats, of every shade and color, in Germany, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria; helping to strengthen the French Communist Party's reign of terror over public opinion—a terror which will wax or wane with the position of Russia in western Europe.

These are not metaphors of political rhetoric, but a literal description of the consequences that follow from the political behavior of *The New Republic*'s editors. The juxtaposition of their editorial statement with political reality could scarcely be more pointed, and the direction in which it points has now become unmistakable: that we have in our midst a powerfully vocal lobby willing to override all concerns of international democracy and decency in the interests of a foreign power. The foci of this infection are the newspaper *PM*, and the liberal weeklies *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. Insofar as the advantage of this foreign power becomes an exclusive end in itself, this lobby functions, as we shall show, as a virtual Fifth Column. Whether those who march always know where they are going, whether they are confused about their purposes or really taken in by sham purposes, they are not any the less a Fifth Column. Political positions are weighed by objective consequences and not by subjective intentions. This is a wellworn truism by now, but it seems it has to be dinned afresh into these "liberal" ears. But when intentions fall out so persistently and shrewdly in one pattern, may we not also conclude that they have a pretty shrewd glimpse of the objective direction?

How has this Fifth Column arisen? and in what forms does it exert its pressures? To answer these questions we must look briefly at its genesis: the process step by step by which the Column has been recruited in our midst during one year of peace.

II

The European War had hardly ended in May 1945, when the rumblings in the Communist Party were announcing preparations for a new line and a new ideological offensive. These had to remain, for a while, preparations only: the war had not yet become entirely imperialist again, as in 1939-41, for Russia had still to play its part in the Japanese War, having in fact to hasten into Manchuria ahead of schedule lest the United States finish the war before Stalin had won it for us. The explosion of the atomic bomb was the dramatic end of the war. The two events were also a simultaneous political

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explosion which blew the war honeymoon to bits, ushering in the new groupings in world politics and opinion.

Humanity had good reason to be afraid now that the atomic bomb had arrived. But in the first rush of journalistic panic it was not always easy to distinguish those afflicted with fear and trembling from those who were merely glad of an occasion to don the robes of prophecy and pontification. The "liberals" seized upon the occasion to launch a new campaign of war hysteria. War in 90 days! *The New Republic* screamed on the first page of one of its issues—which appeared, by the way, more than 90 days ago. The "liberals" fell all over themselves to violate elementary logic: the bomb was no secret, therefore the secret should be given immediately to Russia; or to violate common sense: the secret itself would explode—as if the secret were a ticking infernal machine, and human hands, with definite political purposes, were not required to make a bomb and set it off. *But behind all these antics the essential point of the "liberal" attack was simply that the United States had the bomb and Russia did not.* Here was the first clear-cut indication that a new standard of judgment for all political and social questions had been found: the potential advantage or disadvantage to Soviet Russia. The "liberal" distrust of the United States was as unbounded as their confidence in Russia: in American hands the atomic bomb constituted a threat to the peace of the world, but of course, if Russia had possession of it, the world could rest secure. The millions of Stalin's political victims, if they could speak from the grave, might have a wry comment to make upon this.

The Fifth Column developed steadily through the period of the first meeting of Prime Ministers in London. Molotov wrecked that conference on a legal technicality, which brought an enormous advantage to Russia. The longer Europe remains unsettled by treaty, the longer it remains prey to the occupying Red Army and the Soviet secret police. Stalin can be counted upon to continue this delaying tactic as long as he can get away with it. (The Russian evasiveness when Byrnes recently offered a Security Pact, which would take the Red Army out of certain parts of Europe, was another illustration of this tactic.) Molotov also began to fiddle another tune to which our "liberals" were soon jigging. He accused the United States of playing "atomic power politics," although up to that point Byrnes —considerably to Bevin's disgust—had been giving a remarkable imitation of a diplomatic Caspar Milquetoast. But this did not bother the "liberals." They were showing that they could dance just as

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eagerly as the Communist Party to the official tunes of Russian propaganda—and with just as much disregard of the facts, too.

When the UN Security Council met at London, Russia pulled another tactic out of its bag of tricks which has since been worked by the "liberals" for all it is worth. To forestall inquiry into Russian operations in Europe—at that time in Manchuria too—Vishinsky launched a prompt attack upon British actions in Greece and Indonesia. This is Stalin's game of international chess. When a piece in an advanced attacking position is threatened, he relieves by attacking elsewhere, maintaining thus a continuing but shifting pressure. Again the "liberals" showed they knew how to take the cue. It was their signal to launch an all-out campaign to hate Britain. Some of *PM*'s cartoons on the theme of Perfidious Albion became a match for those of the Hearst-McCormick press, when these latter were conducting their anti-British campaign in the interest of isolationism and Hitler. It used to be considered a liberal principle to attack imperialism wherever it showed its head. But now if Russian imperialism is attacked, the "liberals" rise as one man to shout: "what about Britain?"

This dazzling piece of "liberal" logic may be summed up as: *Two wrongs make a right—and it is always Russia's right.*

The dizzy corruption of logic and morals was to reach new depths in the handling of the Iran case by the "liberal" press. The same day that the *New York Times* carried the first reports of the continued presence of Soviet troops in Iran, I. F. Stone produced in *PM* a masterpiece of journalistic insinuation. Stone turned what purported to be an account of the Iranian situation into a minute description of his own confusions as a reporter in getting the news. Before he had finished, he had managed to convey the impression that the illegal presence of the Red Army in Iran was just a concoction of rumor and innuendo, and probably of British origin at that! Stone does not impress us as one of the innocents; he is a clever enough reporter to know what he is about, and the fact that he has subsequently hewed persistently and bitterly to the anti-British line, shows very well what he is about.

All of *PM*'s staff were promptly mobilized for the defense of the Socialist Fatherland. Max Lerner, who had already played so many comic roles in his career hitherto that one more could not matter, rushed before the footlights in the role of the Ambassador of Iran: he knew better than Hussein Ala what the situation and policy of Iran should be. *PM* transformed the question into a struggle between Britain and Russia for Iranian oil, and the onus of

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guilt was shifted, as one would expect, to perfidious Britain. "We have become tools," I. F. Stone wrote, "in the hands of the British who are intent on maintaining a status quo that would deny Russia additional oil and an outlet to the Mediterranean." What folly for the United States to take Britain's side in this criminal struggle to deny Russia the oil of Iran! From this hackneyed anti-British perspective, the facts that Russia had broken a treaty and that her troops were in a foreign country against that country's will, disappeared from the canvas beneath the deft coloring of *PM*'s apologists.

History was making strange bedfellows when Nicholas Murray Butler and Henry Wallace raised their voices together in support of a new found common friend, Joseph Stalin. Butler, old and ailing, had reached the ripe, overripe, fruit of wisdom, to see that Russia had a right to foreign oil. (In official publications Soviet scientists have stated that Russia has some 58.7% of the world's oil resources—and most as yet undeveloped!) The doddering capitalist was delighted to think this might be just good oldfashioned "respectable" imperialism after all. The fellow travelers, Wendell Wilkie style, would love to believe that Russia is capitalist at heart, and so no worse, and therefore just as good—by God!—as anybody else. In a speech in the Middle West Henry Wallace pleaded that even if Russia were wrong on every point, we should give in for the sake of world peace. At last, a frank and open appeal for appeasement! The hotheaded patriot who screams "My country, right or wrong!" could hardly be more partisan and unreasoning than Wallace in the interests of Russia.

This from a Secretary of Commerce—who, but for a manoeuvre of party politics, might now be President of the United States. Never during the disastrous period of fellow traveling in the 'thirties were the Russian zealots so highly placed in American life. On the floor of the Senate itself, Claude Pepper, senator from Florida, made the startling and impassioned accusation that in its foreign policy the United States was pushing Britain's imperialist cart and "ganging up" with Britain against Russia. The corruption of language could scarcely go much beyond this. "Ganging up" had suddenly become the expression for an inquiry (which would have had to remain at most an inquiry, since the Russian veto would have prohibited any action) into the illegal occupation of one country by another. Meanwhile the tireless Eleanor Roosevelt continued her tiresome pleas for "cooperation" with Russia in order to insure Russian "security."

Yes indeed, Russia must be secure even if we have to sacrifice the security of all her neighbors. What about Iran's security? The

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"liberals" were too busy to raise that question. Besides, as everyone knew, certain reactionary groups in Iran were a distinct threat to Russia. A nation of 15 million a threat to a nation of 180 million! When *Izvestia* made this fantastic charge, it was following precisely Hitler's tactic towards a country he had designated for absorption or conquest—and Hitler had never been more preposterous in his claims of imaginary aggression.

Russia may not gobble up Iran, and the Iranian case may subside into a relatively minor incident; in which case you can expect the "liberals" to set up a shrill hue and cry that the matter was a tempest in a teapot, engineered by reactionaries, over a few months' longer occupation by the Red Army—a few months being, as we all know, but a moment in world history. *PM* has already hinted at this high-historical piece of apologetics. Certainly Russia's operations in Europe are *at this time* immensely more important, however rich in oil Iran be and however decisive Middle Eastern politics will shortly be in the total international picture. Stalin's pressure on Iran eliminates the possibility of opposing pressure against Russian operations in Germany, Poland, and the Balkans. Above all he gains time, which is so important for him. The longer he can operate unchecked in Europe, the more democrats he can shoot. Even if forced to pull back entirely from Iran, he has still won a point, since the Council has been unable meanwhile to bring up the other situations. The Russian game of chess again, and so far working beautifully. Thanks in large part to his various Fifth Columns abroad, who consciously or unconsciously, succeed in misleading public opinion.

But whatever happens, the Iranian case cannot be considered a "minor" incident if for no other reason than that it showed beyond any shadow of doubt what Stalin thinks of the UN. When Gromyko walked out of the Council, his gesture epitomized perfectly the essential *rudeness* of Stalin's regime. Russia—with whom its foreign advocates have persistently demanded "cooperation"— showed itself unwilling to cooperate on anything but its own terms. Protected by its veto, Russia knows it has nothing to fear, and indeed everything to gain from the UN. Stalin will continue to use UN as a front organization, while he carries on his own brand of politics behind the scenes. A few more such walkouts and the UN will be revealed to the world for the farce it is.

Even the die-hard "liberal" apologists became a little hard-pressed as the Iran affair dragged on, and were glad to draw a breath of relief when the Russian satellite, Poland, brought up the Spanish

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question before the Council. A breathing spell at last! Once again they could wrap themselves in the toga of self-righteousness and parade as aggressive champions of democracy all over the world. The "liberals" of *PM, The Nation,* and *The New Republic,* have always required easy whipping boys; this permits an uninterrupted glow of self-righteousness without at the same time exacting the stiff price of intelligence and courage, two qualities they have shown little trace of for the last dozen years. But the very fury of their attack upon Franco is a self-betrayal: they are really for democracy except when and where the interests of the Soviet Union are involved.

Every argument they use to justify intervention in Spain is a valid argument for intervention in Russia. Spain is totalitarian? Beside Stalin's monolithic police state Franco's fascism is a petty and amateur affair. Spain is anti-democratic? Stalin has not only extinguished all traces of democratic liberties among his own people but is engaged in snuffing out these liberties wherever the Red Army has spread. Spain gave aid to Hitler during the war? By the Russo-German Treaty of 1939 Russia gave the indispensable aid, which was the very possibility of launching the war; that treaty was further supplemented by an economic pact under which, during 1939-41, Stalin gave considerable economic aid to Hitler while the latter was fighting the western democracies; and Franco never gave Hitler such outright military aid as the Russian invasion of Poland in 1939. Franco is a menace to world peace? The comparison here becomes laughable when we consider that Spain is a fifth or tenth-rate military power, while Russia maintains the largest standing army in the world, spread at this moment over vast areas outside its own territories; and when we consider too that every recent international tension, which has made the peoples of the world think fearfully of war, has resulted from one or several aggressive manoeuvres on the part of Stalin.

If the "liberals" are uncompromisingly for democracy throughout the world, why not then be for it in Russia too? If they are still in doubt as to the facts about Russia, why not ask the UN for an international commission of inquiry, as in the case of Spain? But the expectation that they will struggle for any such policy is vain. The "liberals" will continue to evade comparisons between Spain and Russia. They will continue to think that Stalin's totalitarianism is somehow different from Franco's, different from Hitler's. Alas yes; the considerable difference is that the former is able to enlist "liberal" support.

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III

It is clear from this outline of their recent behavior that the "liberals" are embarked upon nothing less than a policy of *appeasement of Russia.* This may exist as a confusion and a fear in many "liberal" minds, but it is none the less a policy for all that. A policy is simply the effective direction in which one throws all one's available political weight.

We are not surprised to find appeasement repeating itself, and the new instance already shows all the features familiar from the appeasement of Hitler. It involves first, as we have already said, a campaign to hate Britain, conducted with a new subtlety but with infinitely more political viciousness than that of the Bund and America First groups. When Henry Wallace publicly declares: *"We have no more in common with imperialist England than with Communist Russia,"* he is playing exactly the same game as the appeasers who shouted: *"We have no more in common with imperialist England than with National Socialist Germany."* But those appeasers were at least more honest: they did not masquerade as champions of democracy and they did not have the effrontery to label themselves "liberals." By a well-timed coincidence Ralph Ingersoll's *Top Secret,* which portrays the British as secret villains of World War II, appeared during the Iran case. One step further and Ingersoll himself would have been openly accusing (in effect, he made the accusation at a rally at Madison Square Garden on May 16) the British of working for the defeat of Russia in World War II.

A second feature of this new appeasement is the consistent attack upon the State Department. The discrediting of the State Department very shrewdly paves the way for the kind of attack in *The New Republic,* from which we have quoted at the head of this article. Not the least dishonest aspect of that attack was its pretending to assume that the State Department had in fact already got sufficiently tough against Russia. Instead of trying to needle this timidly conservative Department into a more aggressively democratic policy, the "liberals" are trying to make it stoop lower to the despicable service of pulling Stalin's chestnuts out of the fire for him. Bad as the State Department may be, to treat it as a greater menace to world peace than Stalin's Politburo, to criticize it violently and consistently while Russia is criticized, if at all, only lackadaisically and inconsistently—is a piece of sheer idiocy or sheer knavery.

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But perhaps the grossest ingredient in this new dish of appeasement is the constant "liberal" shout of war. They accuse certain groups of talking in a way that can only lead to war, but in fact nobody is beating the drums of war more loudly than they. Nobody else has been staging public rallies (complete with Frank Sinatra, Olivia de Havilland and the indispensable Pepper) for or against the next war; nobody else has been working with quite such political cunning on the veterans—that particular segment of the population which is most disaffected with war and therefore the easiest prey to propaganda for appeasement—transforming mass-meetings, ostensibly for veterans' housing, into rallies to sanction Russian aggressions.

At this point it is hard to believe we are not being confronted with a piece of conscious deception. Obviously the American people does not want, and could not now be mobilized into war. War cannot therefore be a political issue now. To cry it up as such is to conceal the issues which are really now at stake. If Stalin believed that war were an issue now, he would very quickly change from lion to lamb and pull back from his aggressions. *Pravda* bleated towards Nazi Germany during 1939-41 like the gentlest of lambs because Stalin knew Hitler would not have stood for the kind of treatment now being given the Allies. Stalin knows that neither Britain nor America is ready for a new war, and he strikes while the iron is hot, grabbing off as much as he can now while there is no prospect of armed opposition. This is the immediate compulsion behind present Russian aggression. The "liberals" have been so persuaded that Stalin does not have Hitler's economic compulsions to expand that they will continue to believe whatever he does is done only for "security." How far does he have to go before they will believe it is aggression and not security that is at issue? To the Rhine? the Bay of Biscay? perhaps when Stalin starts to cross the English Channel? But beside the economic reason of plunder, there may be political reasons for expansion—a specifically totalitarian dynamic of expansion to survive. The dictatorship has always been rationalized by keeping the Russian masses in a state of mobilized hostility towards the capitalist world outside Russia. But whatever Stalin's ultimate purposes (and for the present we can only speculate about them), there can be no doubt about what he has done. *We do not have to establish a motive to prove a crime when the crime has been publicly committed before the eyes of the world.*

But granted (which we do not believe) that the situation is as hopeless as "liberals" make out, and any consistent criticism of

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Russia will necessarily lead to war; will appeasement, then, do any better? If war is that inevitable, does it not become a man's duty to cry stinking fish and face up to the inevitability? Was war against Hitler avoided by appeasement? On the contrary, Hitler might have been permanently checked had he been firmly opposed at his very first steps towards aggression. If war between Russia and the United States is not inevitable, then perhaps the only way to avoid it is to stop licking Stalin's boots. After the disastrous record of a whole decade's appeasement of Hitler, surely it is the depth of folly and self-degradation to cast sheep's eyes at appeasement as the way out of war.

IV

But what, then, do the "liberals" really want? Their program is clearly appeasement, but are there any principles, political or human, behind it?

If you are an international revolutionary, you may override the interests of your government for the sake of some principle you regard as higher—international socialism, for example. You may, on the other hand, be a patriot in the specific sense that in a given international situation you think the political values of your government—however imperfect or circumscribed—are worth preserving. You may, finally, persistently override the interests of the government under which you live for the sake of some foreign government from no general principle except that . . . well, you are for that foreign government. The three available political alternatives thus boil down, without needless division into subspecies, to three: you are an international revolutionary, or an American patriot, or—a Russian patriot.

To which category do our "liberals" belong?

International revolutionaries? They have certainly been keeping the secret very well hidden all these years. Have they ever committed themselves even to socialism against capitalism? Well, on the other hand, they have never committed themselves to capitalism against socialism. By being neither fish nor fowl, the "liberals" think to confound their critics, who will not know whether to take them with hook or gun. But taking them as fish *and* fowl, and allowing them moreover to shift their ambiguous biology wherever convenient, we still cannot make them come out right with either logic or principle. If they were socialists, they could not be loyal partisans of the regime which has paralyzed or destroyed every genuine socialist movement

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in our time. Perhaps they are the most incorrigible of myth addicts as still to believe that Russia is socialist in fact or tendency? Then they put themselves beyond the pale of serious consideration, they lose authority to speak seriously on any issue, since they will obviously be immune to any and all facts whenever convenient for them. When J. A. del Vayo recently stated that "after all, Russia *is* socialist," he demonstrated only that *The Nation,* which is currently paying his expenses for a European tour, might keep a tighter fist on its checkbook. Nobody is going to believe that a man who makes this statement will be able to report on even the most obvious political matters abroad. But if Russia were really socialist "after all" (after what? one wonders; even del Vayo cannot make the statement without some repressed demurrer), and the "liberals" are pro-Russian because they are socialists, then why shouldn't they be unequivocally and openly for Russian expansion? Why stop at their present mealy-mouthed and squirming rationalizations instead of declaring openly they want Stalinism to engulf Iran; the Balkans; Europe to the Rhine; yes, to the Atlantic—and then why stop there? Instead of smirking slyly at their discomfitures, the "liberals" should root openly for the checkmate of Byrnes and Bevin whenever this pair goes into conference against Molotov. 'But you really ask too much of me,' the "liberal" pops up at this point, 'you ask me to be *unequivocal!* We know that Stalinism is "after all" socialism, and we "liberals" are all secretly socialist at heart, and that is why we condone Stalin's socialist imperialism; (Stalin showed us there can be "proletarian millionaires," and why not then "socialist imperialism"?); but we distinguish between condoning and declaring openly for expansion, we are careful only to condone Russian expansion because "after all" Stalinism may not be socialism and how can we be sure we are really socialists?'

No; however you try to cast up the "liberal" accounts, you cannot make them come out right, you can find no consistent principle behind their support of Russia. We are left with the third category (their behavior obviously removes them from the second): the "liberals" can only be described as Russian patriots.

We therefore call them a Fifth Column. We do not mean by this that they are officially designated and paid by this foreign power; nor do we claim to say what the term of their services will be. Their services are probably altogether too spontaneous and "pure." But this does not mitigate their guilt for a campaign of concealment, misrepresentation, and deception in the interest of a foreign power—all the more reprehensible in being without any other discoverable principle

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than the devotion itself to that power. We are long since familiar with the fact that the Communist Party is a Fifth Column, since it proposes no other end for all its actions but the advantage of the Soviet Union. The "liberals" have become a more potent and dangerous Fifth Column since they succeed in deceiving a good many more people.

It would take a very obtuse intelligence to miss the Stalinist sympathies of *PM,* but the methods of *The Nation* and *The New Republic* are at once more confused and more subtle. *PM* is the plebeian wing of the "liberal" admirers of Russian totalitarianism, and its methods are therefore far cruder and more obvious. But many readers of *The New Republic* and *The Nation* probably miss the subtle internal politics of book reviewing that goes on week by week. When *The New Republic* wished a reviewer for Victor Kravchenko's *I Chose Freedom,** what happy stroke of editorial inspiration led them to select Frederick Schuman? Is it possible they did not know the kind of review they would get? There is a point beyond which the hypothesis of innocence cannot be stretched. Does the editor know anything about his reviewers beforehand or does he hand his books out to any chance comer in the street? Schuman did not disappoint: for vilification and innuendo his review might almost have adorned the pages of *The Daily Worker.* Among other things, he defended Stalin's terror by pointing to gangsters, lynchings, and strikes in the United States; without mentioning, however, that gangsters and lynchings are not the official program of our government as their equivalents are in Russia. As for strikes, perhaps Schuman would prefer the situation (no doubt, "after all, socialist") in Russia, where striking is a capital offense. The "liberal" weeklies will maintain they are conducting their reviews on the principle of freedom of opinion—remarkable that the "freedom" seems to run so consistently one way. Why didn't they allow such "freedom of opinion" in their reviews of Hitler and Mussolini? Schuman himself is scarcely worth noticing, except that his choice as reviewer and his review itself afford a particularly startling whiff of the "liberal" putrescence. Schuman justifies the Russian terror as the necessary price for rapid industrialization; apart from the fact that this argument has been refuted time and again, all evidence pointing to the continual disruption of industry by the political dictatorship—we might analogously justify Hitler for having reduced unemployment and built magnificent roads in

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Germany, and Mussolini for cleaning Italian cities and making the trains run on time. From the vantagepoint of Mars or of history 500 years from now, some scholarly dilettante might draw up a list balancing favorable and unfavorable aspects of Hitler. But for those who had to confront it politically in their lifetime, a pro and con attitude would have been absolutely without political content: Hitler's regime was essentially vicious and had to be opposed politically. This point is capital, and I dwell on it because the "liberals" somehow think they can salve their conscience by various sad remarks from time to time—which prove their "impartiality," no less!—acknowledging that political liberty is not all it should be in Russia. Are they too stupid or too knavish not to understand that an attitude neatly balanced of pros and cons toward a criminal dictatorship is absolutely without political meaning? Or, rather, that it has only one political meaning: sanction of that dictatorship? The ineffable Ingersoll, again, tells us: "We must be neither for nor against Russia, but we must try to understand her." Analogously, we should have been neither for nor against Hitler, but simply have tried to understand him.

If some "liberals" are slightly taken aback at being called a Fifth Column, they should learn from Victor Kravchenko that the Russian employees in the Soviet Embassy at Washington were allowed to read, of American publications, only *The Daily Worker, PM, The Nation,* and *The New Republic*. During the appeasement of Hitler, these "liberal" publications pointed loudly to every praise the Hearst-McCormick press received in Berlin as proof that these publications were virtual Fifth Columns. Is it likely Stalin is any less shrewd than Hitler in knowing who his friends are?

How far, after all, can we go in excusing people as being unconscious of their motives? When Ralph Ingersoll likened (*PM,* May 6) our military and diplomatic position to Nazi Germany's vis-a-vis Russia, perhaps he was not aware that he was very definitely implying that the United States, and not Russia, is most like Hitler. Perhaps not; but to gauge the effect of such an editorial we must take into account the distinct frame of reference established by the newspaper for its day to day reader—the fact, among many, that Ingersoll's statements appeared in a newspaper whose cartoons have already evolved a snarling bullying type of U. S. Army officer as an American counterpart to the familiar caricature of the ramrod monocled Prussian. And Ingersoll himself gave his cartoons a speaking voice when he declared (at Madison Square Garden, May 16) that the Amer-

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ican military were even now engineering a war against Russia—precisely as if we had here a German High Command operating *as a political force* behind the back of the people. We are not writing this editorial from Kansas or Texas, where we have only the printed words of *The Nation* or *The New Republic* before us, but from New York City, where our frame of reference is also further established by the conversations in which we occasionally engage these people. In conversation certain "liberals" become more open or more unwary (it is hard to say which), and when pushed to the point of the alternative, "You must choose between the United States or Russia," they will occasionally break down and admit: "Well, then I choose Russia." Here the Fifth Column confesses itself, but do not expect such frankness from a "liberal" unless you have pushed him to it.

Yet what do "liberals" really stand to gain from their present frenetic support of Russia except their own political death? A world-wide victory of Stalin would mean their immediate extinction. On the other hand they would fall as the first victims of a terror of the Right as American public opinion becomes solidly mobilized against Russian aggressions. Such a mass movement in America would be condemned to fall into reactionary hands by the "liberals" themselves because they have failed to provide their own leadership. In a situation of impending or existing hostility between America and Russia, the Communists will be dealt with for what they are, outright foreign agents; but reactionaries, never remarkable for niceties of discrimination, have always been a little color-blind to the difference between pink and red friends of Russia, and the reaction, when it comes, would thus clamp a tight lid on all political liberties and perhaps even bring a ruthless suppression of civil liberties. If certain "liberals" insist on digging their own graves, that might seem to be their private affair; but we hope they are not past pleading with that they are dragging down in their own ruin everyone else who genuinely desires the values that have been an essential part of traditional liberalism.

Of course, Stalin may go too far, and the "liberals" will be forced to pull in their horns. At the moment, they are already giving signs of pulling back: Stalin has already gone so far that they are hard put for rationalizations to defend him. These days *PM* can defend Russia only by keeping silent, and switching the spotlight to the threat from German rearmament due to the evil laxness of . . . the British. But do not be deceived, reader. Stalin has only to pull back a little, make a few beneficent remarks about peace and the UN, and his American well-wishers will be on the bandwagon again,

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shouting what a fine fellow he is, and how slanderous, criminal, and endangering to international relations were such criticisms of him as this.

V

The "liberals" will not lack for other evasions meanwhile. Their fecundity for rationalizations has already shown itself bottomless. No doubt they will accuse the views of this editorial as expressing an attitude of hatred towards Russia or Stalin (they do not bother to distinguish)—and probably a "pathological" hatred too, if you please. (Lately they have taken to using a debased and comic version of Freud for what they imagine is an avantgarde weapon of vilification.) But it is they who really hate the Russians, since they do everything within their power to further Stalin's oppression of this people. And is it so pathological to hate a criminal dictator? Was it pathological to hate Hitler? Then it was also pathological for Locke to hate the Stuarts, Voltaire to hate the Bourbons, Beethoven to hate Napoleon, Marx to hate Louis Napoleon, Lenin to hate the Tsar. The "liberals" will also have other worn and tattered scarecrows to shake—any opportunism that comes to hand, anything indeed to avoid the issue of democracy against totalitarianism. Unlike the "liberals," we have no secret and ambivalent longings to "escape from freedom," which we mask under one rationalization or another; and having no totalitarian commitments anywhere in the world, we insist that no compromise be made with totalitarianism.

Until they take at least this minimum position, the "liberals" are obviously usurping a name which they have despoiled of every vestige of its original meaning. The word "liberal" now retains nothing but a denotative value, and that is why we have persisted in keeping it in quotation marks throughout. Whether or not the "liberals" here spoken of will ever earn the removal of quotation marks from their "liberalism," they have already made themselves a long past to live down.

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The Making of a Poem

STEPHEN SPENDER

Apology

IT WOULD be inexcusable to discuss my own way of writing poetry unless I were able to relate this to a wider view of the problems which poets attempt to solve when they sit down at a desk or table to write, or walk around composing their poems in their heads. There is a danger of my appearing to put across my own experiences as the general rule, when every poet's way of going about his work and his experience of being a poet are different, and when my own poetry may not be good enough to lend my example any authority.

Yet the writing of poetry is an activity which makes certain demands of attention on the poet and which requires that he should have certain qualifications of ear, vision, imagination, memory and so on. He should be able to think in images, he should have as great a mastery of language as a painter has over his palate, even if the range of his language be very limited. All this means that, in ordinary society, a poet has to adapt himself, more or less consciously, to the demands of his vocation, and hence the peculiarities of poets and the condition of inspiration which many people have said is near to madness. One poet's example is only his adaptation of his personality to the demands of poetry, but if it is clearly stated it may help us to understand other poets, and even something of poetry.

Today we lack very much a whole view of poetry, and have instead many one-sided views of certain aspects of poetry which have been advertised as the only aims which poets should attempt. Movements such as free verse, imagism, surrealism, expressionism, personalism and so on, tend to make people think that poetry is simply a matter of not writing in metre of rhyme, or of free association, or of thinking in images, or of a kind of drawing room madness (surrealism) which corresponds to drawing room communism. Here is a string of ideas: Night, dark, stars, immensity, blue, voluptuous, clinging, columns, clouds, moon, sickle, harvest, vast camp fire, hell. Is this poetry? A lot of strings of words almost as simple as this are set down on

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the backs of envelopes and posted off to editors or to poets by the vast army of amateurs who think that to be illogical is to be poetic, with that fond question. Thus I hope that this discussion of how poets work will imply a wider and completer view of poets.

Concentration

The problem of creative writing is essentially one of concentration, and the supposed eccentricities of poets are usually due to mechanical habits or rituals developed in order to concentrate. Concentration, of course, for the purposes of writing poetry, is different from the kind of concentration required for working out a sum. It is a focussing of the attention in a special way, so that the poet is aware of all the implications and possible developments of his idea, just as one might say that a plant was not concentrating on developing mechanically in one direction, but in many directions, towards the warmth and light with its leaves, and towards the water with its roots, all at the same time.

Schiller liked to have a smell of rotten apples, concealed beneath the lid of his desk, under his nose when he was composing poetry. Walter de la Mare has told me that he must smoke when writing. Auden drinks endless cups of tea. Coffee is my own addiction, besides smoking a great deal, which I hardly ever do except when I am writing. I notice also that as I attain a greater concentration, this tends to make me forget the taste of the cigarette in my mouth, and then I have a desire to smoke two or even three cigarettes at a time, in order that the sensation from the outside may penetrate through the wall of concentration which I have built round myself.

For goodness sake, though, do not think that rotten apples or cigarettes or tea have anything to do with the quality of the work of a Schiller, a de la Mare, or an Auden. They are a part of a concentration which has already been attained rather than the causes of concentration. De la Mare once said to me that he thought the desire to smoke when writing poetry arose from a need, not of a stimulus, but to canalize a distracting leak of his attention away from his writing towards the distraction which is always present in one's environment. Concentration may be disturbed by someone whistling in the street or the ticking of a clock. There is always a slight tendency of the body to sabotage the attention of the mind by providing some distraction. If this need for distraction can be directed into one chan-

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nel—such as the odor of rotten apples or the taste of tobacco or tea—then other distractions outside oneself are put out of competition.

Another possible explanation is that the concentrated effort of writing poetry is a spiritual activity which makes one completely forget, for the time being, that one has a body. It is a disturbance of the balance of body and mind and for this reason one needs a kind of anchor of sensation with the physical world. Hence the craving for a scent or taste or even, sometimes, for sexual activity. Poets speak of the necessity of writing poetry rather than of a liking for doing it. It is spiritual compulsion, a straining of the mind to attain heights surrounded by abysses and it cannot be entirely happy, for in the most important sense, the only reward worth having is absolutely denied: for, however confident a poet may be, he is never quite sure that all his energy is not misdirected nor that what he is writing is great poetry. At the moment when art attains its highest attainment it reaches beyond its medium of words or paints or music, and the artist finds himself realizing that these instruments are inadequate to the spirit of what he is trying to say.

Different poets concentrate in different ways. In my own mind I make a sharp distinction between two types of concentration: one is immediate and complete, the other is plodding and only completed by stages. Some poets write immediately works which, when they are written, scarcely need revision. Others write their poems by stages, feeling their way from rough draft to rough draft, until finally, after many revisions, they have produced a result which may seem to have very little connection with their early sketches.

These two opposite processes are vividly illustrated in two examples drawn from music: Mozart and Beethoven. Mozart thought out symphonies, quartets, even scenes from operas, entirely in his head—often on a journey or perhaps while dealing with pressing problems—and then he transcribed them, in their completeness, onto paper. Beethoven wrote fragments of themes in note books which he kept beside him, working on and developing them over years. Often his first ideas were of a clumsiness which makes scholars marvel how he could, at the end, have developed from them such miraculous results.

Thus genius works in different ways to achieve its ends. But although the Mozartian type of genius is the more brilliant and dazzling, genius, unlike virtuosity, is judged by greatness of results, not by brilliance of performance. The result must be the fullest development in a created aesthetic form of an original moment of insight, and it

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does not matter whether genius devotes a lifetime to producing a small result if that result be immortal. The difference between two types of genius is that one type (the Mozartian) is able to plunge the greatest depths of his own experience by the tremendous effort of a moment, the other (the Beethovenian) must dig deeper and deeper into his consciousness, layer by layer. What counts in either case is the vision which sees and pursues and attains the end; the logic of the artistic purpose.

A poet may be divinely gifted with a lucid and intense and purposive intellect; he may be clumsy and slow; that does not matter, what matters is integrity of purpose and the ability to maintain the purpose without losing oneself. Myself, I am scarcely capable of immediate concentration in poetry. My mind is not clear, my will is weak, I suffer from an excess of ideas and a weak sense of form. For every poem that I begin to write, I think of at least ten which I do not write down at all. For every poem which I do write down, there are seven or eight which I never complete.

The method which I adopt therefore is to write down as many ideas as possible, in however rough a form, in note books (I have at least twenty of these, on a shelf beside my desk, going back over fifteen years). I then make use of some of the sketches and discard others.

The best way of explaining how I develop the rough ideas which I use, is to take an example. Here is a Notebook begun in 1944. About a hundred pages of it are covered with writing, and from this have emerged about six poems. Each idea, when it first occurs is given a number. Sometimes the ideas do not get beyond one line. For example No. 3 (never developed) is the one line:—

A language of flesh and roses.

I shall return to this line in a few pages, when I speak of inspiration. For the moment, I turn to No. 13, because here is an idea which has been developed to its conclusion. The first sketch begins thus:—

a) *There are some days when the sea lies like a harp*
Stretched flat beneath the cliffs. The waves
Like wires burn with the sun's copper glow
[all the murmuring blue
every silent]

Between whose spaces every image
Of sky [field and] *hedge and field and boat*

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Dwells like the huge face of the afternoon.
[Lies]

When the heat grows tired, the afternoon
Out of the land may breathe a sigh
[Across these wires like a hand. They vibrate
With]
Which moves across those wires like a soft hand
[Then the vibration]
Between whose spaces the vibration holds
Every bird-cry, dog's bark, man-shout
And creak of rollock from the land and sky
With all the music of the afternoon.

Obviously these lines are attempts to sketch out an idea which exists clearly enough on some level of the mind where it yet eludes the attempt to state it. At this stage, a poem is like a face which one seems to be able to visualize clearly in the eye of memory, but when one examines it mentally or tries to think it out, feature by feature, it seems to fade.

The idea of this poem is a vision of the sea. The faith of the poet is that if this vision is clearly stated it will be significant. The vision is of the sea stretched under a cliff. On top of the cliff there are fields, hedges, houses. Horses draw carts along lanes, dogs bark far inland, bells ring in the distance. The shore seems laden with hedges, roses, horses and men, all high above the sea, on a very fine summer day when the ocean seems to reflect and absorb the shore. Then the small strung-out glittering waves of the sea lying under the shore are like the strings of a harp which catch the sunlight. Between these strings lies the reflection of the shore. Butterflies are wafted out over the waves, which they mistake for the fields of the chalky landscape, searching them for flowers. On a day such as this, the land, reflected in the sea, appears to enter into the sea, as though it lies under it, like Atlantis. The wires of the harp are like a seen music fusing seascape and landscape.

Looking at this vision in another way, it obviously has symbolic value. The sea represents death and eternity, the land represents the brief life of the summer and of one human generation which passes into the sea of eternity. But let me here say at once that although the poet may be conscious of this aspect of his vision, it is exactly what

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he wants to avoid stating, or even being too concerned with. His job is to recreate his vision, and let it speak its moral for itself. The poet must distinguish clearly in his own mind between that which most definitely must be said and that which must not be said. The unsaid inner meaning is revealed in the music and the tonality of the poem, and the poet is conscious of it in his knowledge that a certain tone of voice, a certain rhythm, are necessary.

In the next twenty versions of the poem I felt my way towards the clarification of the seen picture, the music and the inner feeling. In the first version quoted above, there is the phrase in the second and third lines

The waves
Like wires burn with the sun's copper glow.

This phrase fuses the image of the sea with the idea of music, and it is therefore a key-phrase, because the theme of the poem is the fusion of the land with the sea. Here, then are several versions of these one and a quarter lines, in the order in which they were written:—

b) *The waves are wires*
Burning as with the secret song of fires

c) *The day burns in the trembling wires*
With a vast music golden in the eyes

d) *The day glows on its trembling wires*
Singing a golden music in the eyes

e) *The day glows on its burning wires*
Like waves of music golden to the eyes.

f) *Afternoon burns upon its wires*
Lines of music dazzling the eyes

g) *Afternoon gilds its tingling wires*
To a visual silent music of the eyes

In the final version, these two lines appear as in the following stanza:—

h) *There are some days the happy ocean lies*
Like an unfingered harp, below the land.

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Afternoon gilds all the silent wires
Into a burning music of the eyes.

On mirroring paths between those fine-strung fires
The shore, laden with roses, horses, spires,
Wanders in water, imaged above ribbed sand.

Inspiration

The hard work evinced in these examples, which are only a fraction of the work put into the whole poem, may cause the reader to wonder whether there is no such thing as inspiration, or whether it is merely Stephen Spender who is uninspired. The answer is that everything in poetry is work except inspiration, whether this work is achieved at one swift stroke, as Mozart wrote his music, or whether it is a slow process of evolution from stage to stage. Here again, I have to qualify the word 'work,' as I qualified the word 'concentration': the work on a line of poetry may take the form of putting a version aside for a few days, weeks or years, and then taking it up again, when it may be found that the line has, in the interval of time, almost rewritten itself.

Inspiration is the beginning of a poem and it is also its final goal. It is the first idea which drops into the poet's mind and it is the final idea which he at last achieves in words. In between this start and this winning post there is the hard race, the sweat and toil.

Paul Valéry speaks of the *'une ligne donnée'* of a poem. One line is given to the poet by God or by nature, the rest he has to discover for himself.

My own experience of inspiration is certainly that of a line or a phrase or a word or sometimes something still vague, a dim cloud of an idea which I feel must be condensed into a shower of words. The peculiarity of the key word or line is that it does not merely attract, as, say, the word 'braggadocio' attracts. It occurs in what seems to be an active, male, germinal form as though it were the centre of a statement requiring a beginning and an end, and as though it had an impulse in a certain direction. Here are examples:—

A language of flesh and roses

This phrase (not very satisfactory in itself) brings to my mind a whole series of experiences and the idea of a poem which I shall perhaps write some years hence. I was standing in the corridor of a

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train passing through the Black Country. I saw a landscape of pits and pitheads, artificial mountains, jagged yellow wounds in the earth, everything transformed as though by the toil of an enormous animal or giant tearing up the earth in search of prey or treasure. Oddly enough, a stranger next to me in the corridor echoed my inmost thought. He said: "Everything there is man-made." At this moment the line flashed into my head

A language of flesh and roses.

The sequence of my thought was as follows: the industrial landscape which seems by now a routine and act of God which enslaves both employers and workers who serve and profit by it, is actually the expression of man's will. Men willed it to be so, and the pitheads, slag-heaps and the ghastly disregard of anything but the pursuit of wealth, are a symbol of modern man's mind. In other words, the world which we create—the world of slums and telegrams and newspapers—is a kind of language of our inner wishes and thoughts. Although this is so, it is obviously a language which has got outside our control. It is a confused language, an irresponsible senile gibberish. This thought greatly distressed me, and I started thinking that if the phenomena created by humanity are really like words in a language, what kind of language do we really aspire to? All this sequence of thought flashed into my mind with the answer which came before the question: *A language of flesh and roses.*

I hope this example will give the reader some idea of what I mean by inspiration. Now the line, which I shall not repeat again, is a way of thinking imaginatively. If the line embodies some of the ideas which I have related above, these ideas must be further made clear in other lines. That is the terrifying challenge of poetry. Can I think out the logic of images? How easy it is to explain here the poem that I would have liked to write! How difficult it would be to write it. For writing it would imply living my way through the imaged experience of all these ideas, which here are mere abstractions, and such an effort of imaginative experience requires a lifetime of patience and watching.

Here is an example of a cloudy form of thought germinated by the word *cross,* which is the key word of the poem which exists formlessly in my mind. Recently my wife had a son. On the first day that I visited her after the boy's birth, I went by bus to the hospital. Passing through the streets on the top of the bus, they all seemed very clean, and the thought occurred to me that everything was prepared for our

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child. Past generations have toiled so that any child born today inherits, with his generation, cities, streets, organization, the most elaborate machinery for living. Everything has been provided for him by people dead long before he was born. Then, naturally enough, sadder thoughts colored this picture for me, and I reflected how he also inherited vast maladjustments, vast human wrongs. Then I thought of the child as like a pin-point of present existence, the moment incarnate, in whom the whole of the past, and all possible futures *cross*. This word *cross* somehow suggested the whole situation to me of a child born into the world and also of the form of a poem about his situation. When the word *cross* appeared in the poem, the idea of the past should give place to the idea of the future and it should be apparent that the *cross* in which present and future meet is the secret of an individual human existence. And here again, the unspoken secret which lies beyond the poem, the moral significance of other meanings of the word 'cross' begins to glow with its virtue that should never be said and yet should shine through every image in the poem.

This account of inspiration is probably weak beside the accounts that other poets might give. I am writing of my own experience, and my own inspiration seems to me like the faintest flash of insight into the nature of reality beside that of other poets whom I can think of. However, it is possible that I describe here a kind of experience which, however slight it may be, is far truer to the real poetic experience than Aldous Huxley's account of how a young poet writes poetry in his novel *Time Must Have a Stop*. It is hard to imagine anything more self-conscious and unpoetic than Mr. Huxley's account.

Memory.

If the art of concentrating in a particular way is the discipline necessary for poetry to reveal itself, memory exercised in a particular way is the natural gift of poetic genius. The poet, above all else, is a person who never forgets certain sense-impressions which he has experienced and which he can re-live again and again as though with all their original freshness.

All poets have this highly developed sensitive apparatus of memory, and they are usually aware of experiences which happened to them at the earliest age and which retain their pristine significance throughout life. The meeting of Dante and Beatrice when the poet was only nine years of age is the experienc which became a symbol in Dante's mind around which the *Divine Comedy* crystallized. The

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experience of nature which forms the subject of Wordsworth's poetry was an extension of a childhood vision of 'natural presences' which surrounded the boy Wordsworth. And his decision in later life to live in the Lake District was a decision to return to the scene of these childhood memories which were the most important experiences in his poetry. There is evidence for the importance of this kind of memory in all the creative arts, and the argument certainly applies to prose which is creative. Sir Osbert Sitwell has told me that his book *Before the Bombardment,* which contains an extremely civilized and satiric account of the social life of Scarborough before and during the last war, was based on his observations of life in that resort before he had reached the age of twelve.

It therefore is not surprising that although I have no memory for telephone numbers, addresses, faces and where I have put this morning's correspondence, I have a perfect memory for the sensation of certain experiences which are crystallized for me around certain associations. I could demonstrate this from my own life by the overwhelming nature of associations which, suddenly aroused, have carried me back so completely into the past, particularly into my childhood, that I have lost all sense of the present time and place. But the best proofs of this power of memory are found in the odd lines of poems written in note books fifteen years ago. A few fragments of unfinished poems enable me to enter immediately into the experiences from which they were derived, the circumstances in which they were written, and the unwritten feelings in the poem that were projected but never put into words.

> *. . . Knowledge of a full sun*
> *That runs up his big sky, above*
> *The hill, then in those trees and throws*
> *His smiling on the turf.*

That is an incomplete idea of fifteen years ago, and I remember exactly a balcony of a house facing a road, and, on the other side of the road, pine trees, beyond which lay the sea. Every morning the sun sprang up, first of all above the horizon of the sea, then it climbed to the tops of the trees and shone on my window. And this memory connects with the sun that shines through my window in London now in spring and early summer. So that the memory is not exactly a memory. It is more like one prong upon which a whole calendar of similar experiences happening throughout years, collect. A memory once clearly stated ceases to be a memory, it becomes perpetually present, because

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every time we experience something which recalls it, the clear and lucid original experience imposes its formal beauty on the new experiences. It is thus no longer a memory but an experience lived through again and again.

Turning over these old note books, my eye catches some lines, in a projected long poem, which immediately re-shape themselves into the following short portrait of a woman's face:—

Her eyes are gleaming fish
Caught in her nervous face, as if in a net.
Her hair is wild and fair, haloing her cheeks
Like a fantastic flare of Southern sun.
There is madness in her cherishing her children.
Sometimes, perhaps a single time in years,
Her wandering fingers stoop to arrange some flowers—
Then in her hands her whole life stops and weeps.

It is perhaps true to say that memory is the faculty of poetry, because the imagination itself is an exercise of memory. There is nothing we imagine which we do not already know. And our ability to imagine is our ability to remember what we have already once experienced and to apply it to some different situation. Thus the greatest poets are those with memories so great that they extend beyond their strongest experiences to their minutest observations of people and things far outside their own self-centredness (the weakness of memory is its self-centredness: hence the narcissistic nature of most poetry).

Here I can detect my own greatest weakness. My memory is defective and self-centred. I lack the confidence in using it to create situations outside myself, although I believe that, in theory, there are very few situations in life which a poet should not be able to imagine, because it is a fact that most poets have experienced almost every situation in life. I do not mean by this that a poet who writes about a Polar Expedition has actually been to the North Pole. I mean, though, that he has been cold, hungry, etc., so that it is possible for him by remembering imaginatively his own felt experiences to know what it is like to explore the North Pole. That is where I fail. I cannot write about going to the North Pole.

Faith.

It is evident that a faith in their vocation, mystical in intensity, sustains poets. There are many illustrations from the lives of poets to

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show this, and Shakespeare's sonnets are full of expressions of his faith in the immortality of his lines.

From my experience I can clarify the nature of this faith. When I was nine, we went to the Lake District, and there my parents read me some of the poems of Wordsworth. My sense of the sacredness of the task of poetry began then, and I have always felt that a poet's was a sacred vocation, like a saint's. Since I was nine, I have wanted to be various things, for example, Prime Minister (when I was twelve). Like some other poets I am attracted by the life of power and the life of action, but I am still more repelled by them. Power involves forcing oneself upon the attention of historians by doing things and occupying offices which are, in themselves, important, so that what is truly powerful is not the soul of a so-called powerful and prominent man but the position which he fills and the things which he does. Similarly, the life of 'action' which seems so very positive is, in fact, a selective, even a negative kind of life. A man of action does one thing or several things because he does not do something else. Usually men who do very spectacular things fail completely to do the ordinary things which fill the lives of most normal people, and which would be far more heroic and spectacular perhaps, if they did not happen to be done by many people. Thus in practice the life of action has always seemed to me an act of cutting oneself off from life.

Although it is true that poets are vain and ambitious, their vanity and ambition is of the purest kind attainable in this world, for the saint renounces ambition. They are ambitious to be accepted for what they ultimately are as revealed by their inmost experiences, their finest perceptions, their deepest feelings, their uttermost sense of truth, in their poetry. They cannot cheat about these things, because the quality of their own being is revealed not in the noble sentiments which their poetry expresses, but in sensibility, control of language, rhythm and music, things which cannot be attained by a vote of confidence from an electorate, or by the office of Poet Laureate. Of course, work is tremendously important, but, in poetry, even the greatest labor can only serve to reveal the intrinsic qualities of soul of the poet as he really is.

Since there can be no cheating, the poet, like the saint, stands in all his works before the bar of a perpetual day of judgment. His vanity of course is pleased by success, though even success may contribute to his understanding that popularity does not confer on him

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the favorable judgment of all the ages which he seeks. For what does it mean to be praised by one's own age, which is soaked in crimes and stupidity, except perhaps that future ages, wise where we are foolish, will see him as a typical expression of this age's crimes and stupidity? Nor is lack of success a guarantee of great poetry, though there are some who pretend that it is. Nor can the critics, at any rate beyond a certain limited point of technical judgment, be trusted.

The poet's faith is therefore, firstly, a mystique of vocation, secondly, a faith in his own truth, combined with his own devotion to a task. There can really be no greater faith than the confidence that one is doing one's utmost to fulfil one's high vocation, and it is this that has inspired all the greatest poets. At the same time this faith is coupled with a deep humility because one knows that, ultimately, judgment does not rest with oneself. All one can do is to achieve nakedness, to be what one is with all one's faculties and perceptions, strengthened by all the skill which one can acquire, and then to stand before the judgment of time.

In my Notebooks, I find the following Prose Poem, which expresses these thoughts:

> *Bring me peace bring me power bring me assurance. Let me reach the bright day, the high chair, the plain desk, where my hand at last controls the words, where anxiety no longer undermines me. If I don't reach these I'm thrown to the wolves, I'm a restless animal wandering from place to place, from experience to experience.*
>
> *Give me the humility and the judgment to live alone with the deep and rich satisfaction of my own creating: not to be thrown into doubt by a word of spite or disapproval.*
>
> *In the last analysis don't mind whether your work is good or bad so long as it has the completeness, the enormity of the whole world which you love.*

Song.

Inspiration and song are the irreducible final qualities of a poet which make his vocation different from all others. Inspiration is an experience in which a line or an idea is given to one, and perhaps also a state of mind in which one writes one's best poetry. Song is far more difficult to define. It is the music which a poem as yet unthought of will assume, the empty womb of poetry for ever in the poet's consciousness, waiting for the fertilizing seed.

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Sometimes, when I lie in a state of half-waking half-sleeping, I am conscious of a stream of words which seem to pass through my mind, without their having a meaning, but they have a sound, a sound of passion, or a sound recalling poetry that I know. Again sometimes when I am writing, the music of the words I am trying to shape takes me far beyond the words, I am aware of a rhythm, a dance, a fury, which is as yet empty of words.

In these observations, I have said little about headaches, midnight oil, pints of beer or of claret, love affairs, and so on, which are supposed to be stations on the journeys of poets through life. There is no doubt that writing poetry, when a poem appears to succeed, results in an intense physical excitement, a sense of release and ecstasy. On the other hand, I dread writing poetry, for, I suppose, the following reasons: a poem is a terrible journey, a painful effort of concentrating the imagination; words are an extremely difficult medium to use, and sometimes when one has spent days trying to say a thing clearly one finds that one has only said it dully; above all, the writing of a poem brings one face to face with one's own personality with all its familiar and clumsy limitations. In every other phase of existence, one can exercise the orthodoxy of a conventional routine: one can be polite to one's friends, one can get through the day at the office, one can pose, one can draw attention to one's position in society, one is—in a word—dealing with men. In poetry, one is wrestling with a god.

Usually, when I have completed a poem, I think 'this is my best poem,' and I wish to publish it at once. This is partly because I only write when I have something new to say, which seems more worth while than what I have said before, partly because optimism about my present and future makes me despise my past. A few days after I have finished a poem, I relegate it to the past of all my other wasted efforts, all the books I do not wish to open.

Perhaps the greatest pleasure I have got from poems that I have written is when I have heard some lines quoted which I have not at once recognized. And I have thought 'how good and how interesting,' before I have realized that they are my own.

In common with other creative writers I pretend that I am not, and I am, exceedingly affected by unsympathetic criticism, whilst praise usually makes me suspect that the reviewer does not know what he is talking about. Why are writers so sensitive to criticism? Partly, because it is their business to be sensitive, and they are sensitive

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about this as about other things. Partly, because every serious creative writer is really in his heart concerned with reputation and not with success (the most successful writer I have known, Sir Hugh Walpole, was far and away the most unhappy about his reputation, because the 'highbrows' did not like him). Again, I suspect that every writer is secretly writing for *someone*, probably for a parent or teacher who did not believe in him in childhood. The critic who refuses to 'understand' immediately becomes identified with this person, and the understanding of many admirers only adds to the writer's secret bitterness if this one refusal persists.

Gradually one realizes that there is always this someone who will not like one's work. Then, perhaps, literature becomes a humble exercise of faith in being all that one can be in one's art, of being more than oneself, expecting little, but with a faith in the mystery of poetry which gradually expands into a faith in the mysterious service of truth.

Yet what failures there are! And how much mud sticks to one; mud not thrown by other people but acquired in the course of earning one's living, answering or not answering the letters which one receives, supporting or not supporting public causes. All one can hope is that this mud is composed of little grains of sand which will produce pearls.

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The Lake

CHARLES SPIELBERGER

GEORGE TILTED my wheel-chair back, gripped it firmly, and we slowly descended the steep lawn of the boarding-house to a fenced meadow. George lifted away the two planks that had been crossed to bar the gate, doing it quickly because they were hot, and he tried to push me along. But the ground was too stump-filled and rocky and dung-crusted for my wheel-chair.

"You'll have to walk," said George. "Why don't you stay with Ma, and come down later?"

"Mamma promised me I could go, George. She said you'd take me if I was good in the car. I want to go. I'm going."

"You're always good at the wrong time," said George. "Look, I'll let you row with me if you wait. How would you like that?"

"I want to go now," I said.

"You'll get tired, and it'll be twice as long. Ma could bring you to the lake in a couple of minutes. I'd row you around the whole lake if you'd wait."

"No, I'm going now."

He raised me to my feet, and, with his large hands supporting me below my arm-pits, I struggled along. The sun bit into me, and the air seemed choked. I wore a metal piece on my left leg, whose edge cut my flesh now, and I had on a corset-like apparatus for keeping my spine rigid, which twisted about with great discomfort, and made me sweat miserably. I soon started to pant, my heart swinging back and forth like an old bell. I stopped to rest. Ahead, at a distance of perhaps three hundred feet, the lake sprawled, shimmering. I blew away some green flies that roared about me, in golden armor, stinging me. At my left was a barn, and fragrance came from hay already piled to the loft's open windows; to my right, I saw black and white cows clustered, then a little wood, and, high up and far off, blue-shawled mountains.

"You've rested enough," said George. "Hurry up now, Jerry. We'll never get there at this rate. Don't be lazy. Hurry up now. If

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you don't go any faster, I'm going to have to leave you and go on by myself."

I was afraid he would really do that, and I walked with the longest and quickest strides I could manage. George began to draw me up by nasty spots and set me upon my feet again where the space was flat and clear. The sun bore down more and more strongly, and I remembered the time George held a magnifying-glass over my hand and let the sun glint through until I had a terrible pain and a wisp of smoke rose up, but George didn't release me before Mamma came: he just pressed me down on my hammock there, in our back-yard, while I suffered from that magnifying-glass set above me in a merciless poise.

I was pricked by the scraggy leaves of a bush. George forced his fingers deeper into my flesh. I would surely have been glad to be with Mamma, but I had dwelt upon the lake for many months, with great desire, and now, seeing it, I was willing to accept any exhaustion and any difficulty to reach it; and I thought George might row me, and I wanted that very much.

"This is the last chance I'm giving you," said George. "Are you going to hurry, or aren't you? Get going, damn it," he said, squeezing my shoulders.

"I'll tell Mamma you're using dirty language," I said.

"I don't give a damn. Come on!"

I succeeded in walking slightly quicker, but my toes very often snagged and tripped, and George had to be careful that I did not fall. I turned my head to rub my cheek on George's stomach, getting rid of a fly that was too far down for my tongue to chase it; I felt how tense his muscles were. George once held his breath and, for the bet of a nickel, allowed another boy to hit him in his stomach; George had smiled after the blow, and then stood on his head for a minute, and refused the nickel. He intended to become an athlete. But Daddy said he wasn't clever, and I liked to know I calculated small sums better than George.

He finally burst out:

"I'm leaving you here, damn you! You're just stalling to look at those cows. I'm leaving you here." He didn't move, though; but I could tell how furious he had become.

"Please, George," I said. "I'll go faster. I promise I will. I'll be there in a minute. It's not late yet. Mamma'd be awful mad at you."

He thought for a short while, as though he were afraid of his

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own decision. Without being able to see George's face, I knew his look; the clean sturdiness of his pineneedle-green eyes; the drawn up anticipation of his cheeks, that he had when I saw him playing baseball and his hands were fixed with sureness that he would catch the ball; the deep brown of his forehead and hair melting imperceptibly together; and the conflict of his pressing lips, while his lean jaws braced, clenched, in a fore-stuck shape; and I could readily imagine the perspiration swelling out upon his earliest crop of beard, and swarming upon his hairy chest, where it discoloured the low-necked yellow shirt he had for hot days and wore with a changeless lethargy and yet resolution that so well typified his character.

"I guess I'll carry you," said George. "I don't see why I couldn't —I'm strong enough all right."

"George, don't. You can fall; and I don't like you to besides."

"Because you'll look like a baby?"

"No. Please don't. Let's go right on like we were; I can make it, George. We'll be there in a couple of minutes."

George swooped his right arm below my knees, and his left around my shoulders, and he pulled me up. I protested. He didn't pay me any attention. He continued straight ahead, over the field, and only stopping for the big boulders that protruded here and there. The cows, munching the sparse grass that remained, moved away as we passed, and I was afraid one would bite me when her tail struck my foot once. The sun fell with a leering fullness upon my unsheltered face. We went along rapidly, and I saw there could be no purpose in arguing with George, because then he might not take me rowing; Mamma told him to be careful with me, and under no circumstances let me go onto the water, but George might do that if he thought I behaved well and I asked in the right way.

We had been advancing gently for about four or five minutes, when George started to trot. I begged him not to.

"Don't think I can run? I could run with you just like that," and he spat down onto the earth. "I'm so damned strong, I could run with two of you."

"I believe you, George," I said; "but let's just keep going on like this. We'll be there right away."

"Scared of my running with you?" he asked.

I didn't know how to answer him: if I admitted that it would frighten me, George would say: "Then I'll show you you've got nothing to worry about"; and if I said that I was not frightened,

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George would say: "Good; then we can run." I chose silence, hoping we would reach the lake before he had time to run. He must have understood my idea, because he ran with startling speed.

"Watch me! I'm as fast as the wind!" he shouted.

And I enjoyed the dread inspired by the rushing. But, suddenly, I felt his chest heave, and the sweat press onto my ears from his arms, and I knew that something was about to happen. Then I heard his foot stopped on a rock, and I felt the air letting me cut a path into it. I landed on my back. My ankle gnashed upon rock, and a thunder rolled through me with a stunning pain. Before I could gather my senses, George had risen and stood over me saying:

"Are you hurt? You're not killed or something? Will you speak, damn you?"

I was too numbed by a general ache throughout even to cry. My head spun like a wheel, and my limbs were groaning. I slowly identified the pain in my ankle.

"Are you hurt, or aren't you?" George asked.

I was afraid he was going to hit me.

"My ankle, George! My ankle!"

He lifted up my left leg; he pressed my toes back.

"Don't! My ankle!"

"If you can stand it, nothing's broken. Come on, you're all right," said George, stooping over me.

The sun beat like splinters of rain upon my face. My left elbow felt peculiar. It didn't bother me, but I had the mushy taste in the nerves that it bled. I looked that way. A mass of new dung lay there in a warm pool. Then I wept.

"What's wrong now?" George asked. "You just said you're not hurt! What do you want now?"

I could only wail with anguish, and I did not know why I reacted so violently.

"If you don't keep quiet," said George, "I'll walk off and leave you here and never come back."

"George—George—George—" I struggled to speak, giving a better perspective each time to the calling of his name. "George, don't—don't do that. I want to go back. Take me to Mamma."

"Look," said George, "how would you like me to take you rowing? We could fish, maybe. I'd let you hold the line. How would that be? I'll carry you down to the lake real carefully, don't worry; and you can get cleaned up down there, and we could have a good

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time. How would that be? Just don't say anything to Ma, Jerry, and we'll have a good time. How does that sound?"

"All right, George," I said. I could always tell Mamma later about the way George had treated me. He sat me up and put me into his arms. He laughed, with his bronze laugh, at my elbow, and let that arm hang down as we moved along. Perhaps twenty feet separated us from the lake, but George covered them with the wary gentle tread of one fearful of disturbing deer prey. He went down the few rotten wooden steps one at a time. He turned and rested me against the rocks, which led up to form a sort of lane before the lake; it stretched, on the one side, to the steps we had followed, and, on the other, around and out to the afar road, striking through a region of bushes where berries were to be picked now and where the trees hid animals for hunting in the winter. George left me there for a minute, and walked over the weeded ground that led to a short pier or landing. I remember that four row-boats were moored by iron chains, and the stern of every row-boat, all of a shingling-off grey paint, battered at random, hopelessly, to and fro, striking the landing and bouncing away. George broke off a frond from the lake and, keeping it in his mouth, shaped his fingers into a bowl, and filled his palms with water. He needed to make a few trips before, pouring the water onto my elbow and rubbing it with the frond, I was clean. While he did this, I was fascinated by my view of the lake: it seemed only a reflection of the sun, fiercely pumping eddies of red water like a heart. George leaned on the rocks and took off his shirt, scanning the landscape. I saw that the dock was in an alcove formed by bushy juts and then expanded to a fairly broad space of water, broken up with stumps of trees on which turtles basked. Two boats were out at the limit of the horizon, and I could see people standing up in them, casting their fishing lines out in wide arcs against the dense wilderness of the minor forest surrounding the entire lake.

"Why don't you rest here a little, Jerry?" he asked me. "I could see how things are, and come back for you in a couple of minutes. How would that be?"

"No. If you want me to tell Mamma, George. I will if you don't take me."

"All right; but I'm going to let you know right now that you'd better not say anything to Ma. I'll get even with you if you do."

George got me up on my legs and I, still agitated and bruised from the fall, gradually got to the landing. He put my legs over the

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edge, keeping one hand in readiness for an accident, entered a row-boat, and, after much maneuvering, sat me in back on the stern's bench. Then George left me briefly to gather the fishing equipment prepared on the landing. He laid the can with the worms in my lap. He tried to row without the oar-locks, sitting beside me, but he couldn't do that, so he took the seat in the middle and rowed us out; I found that the water was shallow on the entire lake. He handled the oars with that supple grace which is rare in amateurs. Small fish scattered about us, alarmed. George soon bumped against one of the tree stumps, and he had trouble disentangling us.

"George," I asked, "couldn't we catch a turtle? You could catch a turtle. I'll bet you could. You could sneak up on a turtle and grab it. Over there—there's a turtle over there, on that rock. Couldn't you get over there quietly and put it in the boat before it gets away? There's a big black one. I'll bet you could do it, George."

"What for? You don't need any turtles."

"Aw, you just don't think you could do it," I said.

"You can't get me to do it that way," said George.

He brought us further out, and we passed over a bed of fronds, slipping through their midst with the sound of a dress rustling on a floor. I leaned down and bit into the thumb of my left hand, where the callous had formed, and placed my hand out into the water. I enjoyed the vigorous feeling made by our wake, pulling my fingers out and back, as if I curried the water. As George became accustomed to the oars, he rowed with faster but easier strokes, and my fingers dragged severely. I asked George to lift my hand back.

"What did you stick it there for if you can't get it out by yourself?" he said, annoyed.

But he stood up, shaking the boat, ending the illusion that we slid as if by magic, and he balanced his weight until he could reach me and draw my hand up again. Returning to his seat, George swung the boat about and made for the opposite shore, where one of the rowing parties was. The pitiless glare of the sun settled upon George to steepen the handsome earthiness of his complexion, and emphasized the lightness of flesh that escaped above the black belt around his gray bathing-suit. George fixed his soles against the board provided, and wielded the oars with the serenity of a giant bird. I looked at the row-boat we were coming upon; within it was a family comprised of a very tall man, who, at the moment, was reeling in his fishing line, watching below the silver glint of his lure; a woman of nearly

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forty years, or so I judged, was sitting in the rear, reclining, absorbing the sunlight with fortitude; and, holding the woman about the waist, watching us, was a girl of sixteen or seventeen, in a brown bathing-suit, a large and many-coloured pocket-book slung across her shoulder, her blonde hair slipping behind her so deeply that I momentarily thought it touched the water, her eyes bulging with a well-hardened blueness, her sharp lips opened to show good teeth, and her whole litheness of features raised into wrinkles.

"Hello!" George called, coming to their side.

"Afternoon," said the man. "I haven't seen you around; just come up?"

"Yes. How's the fishing?"

"Pretty terrible. They're not biting."

"Pickerel?"

"Pickerel or whales—they're not biting. I got two, one right after the other, about an hour ago. I tried near the mouth—by the shore—and then I got one here. Fair size. One must be pretty nearly fourteen inches. What's the trouble with you, son?" he asked me.

"He's crippled," George said, nodding towards me.

"Can't he talk?" asked the man.

"Sure he can," said George. "Say something, Jerry."

I concentrated on the worms wriggling in the tin can.

"Let him alone," said the woman. "He's not an animal, you know."

I liked her.

"Al," she said, "you ought to have enough sense to keep quiet about the boy."

"How long are you going to be up here?" the girl aswed George. "My name's Bette. We're the Halls—the family, I mean. My mother's Mrs. Hall. What's your name?"

"George; my brother's Jerry. Jerry, speak to them. You talk all the time; what's wrong with you now? If you don't speak, I'll go over and get you to."

"Let him alone," said Mrs. Hall.

"We'll be up here for about two weeks or a month or so," said George, smiling to Bette. He looked up at Mr. Hall. "How long will you be here?"

"Till Sunday night—to-morrow night. My vacation will be up then."

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"Oh. That's tough. Would have been nice if you could stay longer; couldn't you?" asked George.

" 'Fraid not," said Mr. Hall.

"What's there doing around here?" George asked Bette.

"Not too much," she said. "Until you came up, there weren't any people—any people of our age, at all. The Bartons—those people in the boat over there—have two baby children, and they're kind of old themselves, of course. There's the old woman and her son, Ben, but he's thirty-five or fifty; and there's three families that are here in couples with children, but we don't know them too well."

Mr. Hall cast his fishing-line. Mrs. Hall smiled at me and I smiled back; but I was pleased that she did not talk to me. Bette licked her lips with a white tongue.

"We went down to the village—to Martinsville, but there's only a picture and a soda place there. Mr. Jennings—the man who owns the place—says there might be some dancing there to-night in the hotel; you can get into the hotel, even if you don't live there."

"I'm shoving off," said Mr. Hall. "No fish here."

"Why don't you get in with me, Bette?" George said.

"All right. Can I, Father?"

"I guess so. Except that—say, George, can she catch anything from your brother? What's wrong with him?"

"He can't do nothing," said George; "he's not sick any more. He's only crippled. You don't have to worry about that, Mr. Hall. Jerry's not sick; are you, Jerry?"

I gazed at a worm.

"Jerry, speak to them! They think you're crazy or something. Go ahead and talk. You always shut up at the wrong time. Just say, 'I'm fine,' or 'How are you?'—or something. Don't act like a baby. They think you're a baby. If you don't talk, I'll row you back. I swear I will!"

"He's bashful," said Mrs. Hall. "Don't bother him. And, Al, why do you have to ask so many silly questions? Do you suppose his parents would let him go around with George if he was contagious—do you?"

Bette clambered through and sat with George.

"See you later," she said.

"Be careful," Mrs. Hall warned George.

He laughed, and we fled through a dense garden of fronds. A playful breeze had begun to stir. I saw a number of tiny fish,

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and one large fish with a spotty complexion. George had to row with Bette on the edge of her seat. They spoke with a certain casual habit. Finally, I heard Bette ask George about my illness.

"Poliomyelitis," he said, with pride.

"Jerry, aren't you going to tell me your name?" she asked me.

I turned to see if Mamma was at the shore yet; I wondered what delayed her. The two other row-boats were being tied to the posts.

"Answer her!" George shouted.

"I don't want to. I want to fish. You promised me I could hold the fishing line."

"Since you are so stubborn, I'm not going to let you," said George.

"But you promised."

"I'm going to fish by myself," said George. He picked up the pole, and the tin can.

"You promised me, George."

"I didn't."

"You said you would. When Mamma comes. . . . "

"Don't bother me!" he roared.

Bette stared at me peculiarly.

George fitted a worm onto his hook with a gruesome determination. His enormous shadow lay like a hood over me, extinguishing the sunlight.

"Care for a smoke, George?" Bette asked.

"Sure," he said.

She lit two at the same time, and gave him one. He inhaled with a confidence that told me this was not his first cigarette. I reflected that I would have to tell Mamma about it. She snapped shut her pocket-book. So that George should not see my anger, I studied the frenzied pattern of its colours.

George stepped firmly to the boat's prow. I slid over a bit as he tilted us. George tested the reel, and, throwing his arm back, hurled out the line. It glistened. The hook landed close enough for me to follow its course. I tried to move back, but the precariousness of the boat, near overturning and near balancing, made me wait. As he reeled in, I said:

"George! I'm going to fall out!"

He glanced at me. "No, you're not. You're all right there."

On his second casting, I slipped to the edge, and my body fell

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half out. I noticed that a greenish object darted for George's worm. The pole leaned down, doubled over with a vibrating tautness.

"A fish! A strike!" George cried.

I dropped over further, hanging suspended. I screamed for help. I noticed the fishing-pole for a second: it strained, with George's will to capture and the fish's will to survive conducting through the bamboo in an agitated fury.

"George!" I yelled, as he, blowing smoke, fought, looping down to triumph.

The water was cold. I had on so much clothing and metal that the water engulfed me and sealed me off before I could breathe; I hit upon a slimy bottom, that also sought to bury me. I gasped. My insides became wet, stifling the air in my lungs, snuffing it out. I tried to battle against the death I drank and the death pressing from above and the death seizing from below. A black monster gripped me. I thought this was the real death; I twisted to release myself. I heard cushioned sounds. My eyes swarmed. Then the sun shattered upon me. I felt Bette's breasts pad my eyes. She handled me with ease. She let me down onto the planked floor. She had an idiot grin, towering there with her legs on either side of my chest. I inhaled but the air came in like wooden weights. I became terrified. George jumped up and rolled into the boat. He pushed me over, and, amid a pummeling at my back and hips, I heaved out water, and at last I could breathe; and it seemed to me as though I were unable to have enough air. Then, my thoughts, which had been swirling, chasing each other, kicking and fighting, began to stabilize, began to settle into a craving demand: I bellowed:

"I want Mamma! George, I want Mamma!"

"He's all right; if he wants his Mamma, there's nothing wrong with him," George laughed to Bette; he corrected my position until I sat where I had been originally. Despite the sunlight, I rattled with cold from my dripping ears to my soaked shoes. But I could only think of Mamma: she would make everything all right.

"Bring me home! I want Mamma. Mamma, Mamma, Mamma! I want Mamma!"

"Damn' right I'm getting rid of you," said George. "I'll never take care of you again." As he spoke, the gathering momentum of his words also went into the increasing swiftness of his rowing. "You're more damn' trouble than you're worth, you are. I take you out here to show you a good time, and all you give me are worries." I could

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not be sure if he addressed his irritation to me or to Bette; it did not matter, though, because I realized that we came to the shore the sooner as his irritation grew. "My God! I'll never take care of you again. I almost had that fish. Was he big! I would have had him too, if you didn't pull a stunt like that. . . . See how I gave him artificial respiration, Bette? I learned that at the beach, from a fellow that knew a life-guard, and he taught me—he did, this fellow."

George got onto the walk. He fastened the chain.

"How's about swimming?" George asked her.

"Fine. When you leave Jerry, we could swim out, or maybe dive off the boat," she said.

George bent to pull me out, but I was too far below him.

"Here, I can help you," said Bette. She strode up to me and lifted me up from my chest. I was ashamed that she should handle the apparatus I wore, and her surprised face left me still more ashamed. George stood me onto my feet. A puddle formed.

"George," I said, "do I have to walk back? Couldn't you get Mamma and I'd stay here?"

"Sure," George said. He led me to the rocks, where I had stayed earlier.

"You can lay here and dry out," said George, and, while I protested, he extended me to face the sun.

"Get Mamma, though, George! I'll be good and wait here. Please, please, George," I screamed. "Please!"

George joined Bette, saying, as they departed:

"I hope this teaches you a lesson. You're the damn' rottenest brat that ever lived!"

I closed my eyes, because the sun was directly over me. Flies charged in. I twisted towards the lake, and I discerned the bouncing shapes of Bette and George. I averted my head to the shadow fringe of the rocks, against which the hookless fishing-pole stood; it gladdened me that the fish had escaped. And I waited for Mamma.

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London Letter

DEAR EDITORS,

It is unfortunate that in order to get this letter off in time I must write it before any definite result has emerged from the negotiations in India, and before the battle over Communist affiliation to the Labour Party is fully joined. The big masses are not alive to the importance of the Indian issue, and until something dramatic happens it will be difficult to judge what their feelings about Indian independence really are. The Communist issue arouses perceptibly more interest. It is not yet certain whether the Communists will have another try at affiliation, and, if they do, the move will probably be defeated by one means or another at the forthcoming Labour Party conference. But, owing to the anomalies in the constitution of the Labour Party, it is just thinkable that they might bring it off, with disastrous results. The leaders of the Labour Party evidently regard the danger as serious and have been denouncing the Communists in no uncertain terms. It is a complicated issue, but I think I can make it clearer if I first sketch in the general political background.

First of all, as to the standing of the Labour government with the nation as a whole. There is no question in my mind that this continues to be good, and all evidence in the form of local elections and public opinion polls confirms this. At the same time we have as yet had no solid advantage from the change of the government, and people in general are aware of this. For anyone outside the armed forces, life since the armistice has been physically as unpleasant as it was during the war, perhaps more so, because the effects of certain shortages are cumulative. The clothing shortage, for instance, becomes less and less tolerable as our clothes become more and more completely worn out, and during last winter the fuel situation was worse than it had been at any time during the war. Food is as dull as ever, the queues do not get any shorter, the contrast between the wealthy person who eats in restaurants and the housewife who has to make do on her rations is as glaring as it always was, and every kind of privation seems more irritating because there is no war to justify it. Black Market activities are said to have increased since the war stopped. Then, again, the housing situation does not improve, and is unlikely to do so for a long time to come, and there is

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already an appreciable amount of unemployment. On the other hand there is resentment against long hours and bad working conditions, which has shown itself in a series of "unofficial" strikes. When you listen to the conversations in the fish queue you can hardly doubt that the average working-class person is discontented, feels that the ending of the war ought to have brought him more comfort and amusement, and does not see why our loaves should be made smaller or our beer reduced in order to prevent Europe from starving.

And yet there seems to be extraordinarily little hostile criticism on strictly political grounds. One cannot get a true idea of the general reaction from the British press, because the big newspapers are mostly owned by Tories while part of the minority press is under Communist influence. I have heard almost endless grumbling because "they" are not providing new houses quickly enough, or because "they" won't let you have enough coal to last through the winter, or because of bad travelling conditions, income tax, slowness of demobilisation, the expensiveness of vegetables, the smallness of the milk ration, and I do not know what else: but what I have not heard any ordinary person say is that the government has not made any perceptible step towards the introduction of Socialism. Even allowing for the fact that everything takes time, it is astonishing how little change seems to have happened as yet in the structure of society. In a purely economic sense, I suppose, the drift is towards Socialism, or at least towards state ownership. Transport, for example, is being nationalised. The railway shareholders are being bought out at prices they would hardly get in the open market: still, the control of the railways is being taken out of private hands. But in the social set-up there is no symptom by which one could infer that we are not living under a Conservative government. No move has been made against the House of Lords, for example, there has been no talk of disestablishing the Church, there has been very little replacement of Tory ambassadors, service chiefs or other high officials, and if any effort is really being made to democratise education, it has borne no fruit as yet. Allowing for the general improverishment, the upper classes are still living their accustomed life, and though they certainly dislike the Labour government, they don't appear to be frightened of it. All this fits in with the British preference for doing things slowly and not stirring up class hatred—still, I think almost any observer would have expected a greater change in the social atmosphere when a Labour government with a crushing majority had been in power for eight months.

But it is not on these grounds that the average person expresses discontent. In so far as they bother with politics, people still feel that they won a great victory last summer—as indeed they did—and though the deeds of the new government are perhaps somewhat uninspiring, there is no competing ideology in sight. The Conservative Party is bankrupt of

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ideas, as even its own publicists admit. All it can do is to yap against "state interference" and "bureaucracy," which the ordinary person may slightly dislike but far prefers to economic insecurity. A good many Tories now believe that their best hope lies in the Communists, who might succeed in splitting the Labour Party and forcing the right-wing Labour leaders to form another coalition. I don't myself believe that this will happen, but it is a fact that the Communists are at present the main danger to the government, and might become a real political force if some calamity abroad—for instance, large-scale fighting in India—made the government's foreign policy acutely unpopular.

The actual number of Communists and "fellow travellers" is still only a few score thousands, and has no doubt dwindled over the past year. But while they have somewhat lost ground with the general public, they have now succeeded in capturing the leadership of several important unions, and in addition there is the group of "underground" Communist M.Ps—that is, M.Ps elected as Labour men but secretly members of the C. P. or reliably sympathetic to it. The number of these is uncertain, but I should say there are twenty or thirty of them, out of a total of something over 300 Labour M.Ps. Their tactic, needless to say, is to clamour inside and outside Parliament for a policy of appeasement towards the USSR, and at the same time to try to group the Left elements in the country round them by playing on domestic discontent. At present they have rather isolated themselves by making their aims too obvious, and expressions like "infiltration" and "crypto-Communist" are now being bandied about by people who had hardly heard of such things a year ago. When Bevin had a show-down with the Parliamentary Labour Party on the question of his foreign policy, only six M.Ps would actually vote against him, though others abstained. Considering that the USSR is and must be implacably hostile to a social-democratic government of the British type, it is clear that a combination of open Communists like Arthur Horner at the head of big trade unions, "underground" Communists like Zilliacus in Parliament, and "sympathisers" like Priestley in the popular press, could be very dangerous. But the difficulty for these people is that they cannot lay their main emphasis on domestic grievances. They are tied to the defence of Russian foreign policy, which the ordinary person feels to be simply indefensible. From reading the minority left-wing press you might get the idea that the Labour Party is seething with revolt and that the rank-and-file Labour supporter is full of enthusiam for the Russian actions in Iran, Rumania etc., and is also pining to hand over the secrets of the atomic bomb without getting any military information in return. It is certain however, that this is not so. The public opinion polls taken by the *News-Chronicle* showed that Bevin's popularity went sensationally *up* after his battle with Vishinsky, and went up most of all among Labour Party supporters. I doubt even

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whether there is widespread feeling against Bevin's policies in Greece and Indonesia, in so far as these are still live issues. But as for the USSR, it is hardly denied even by Russophiles that the popular enthusiasm of a year or two ago has worn very thin. If there were no other symptoms at all, I could infer this merely from my own postbag. As open apologists of the Stalin regime, the Communists are now playing on a losing wicket. And yet if they could get inside the Labour Party as an organised body, they might be able to do enormous mischief. Even the worst kind of split could hardly result in a Communist-controlled government, but it might bring back the Conservatives—which, I suppose, would be less dangerous from the Russian point of view than the spectacle of a Labour government making a success of things.

Politically there is not much else happening. There has been some slight activity on the part of the Mosleyites and other Fascist groups, but there is no sign that they have any mass following. The intellectual struggle between Stalinists and anti-Stalinists goes on and on, with frequent sensational defections from one side or the other. Wyndham Lewis, I am credibly informed, has become a Communist or at least a strong sympathiser, and is writing a book in praise of Stalin to balance his previous books in favor of Hitler. All who bother about politics are immersed in the day-to-day struggle over Trieste, Palestine, India, Egypt, the nationalisation of steel, the American loan, re-housing, the Health Service bill, and I do not know what else, but no thoughtful person whom I know has any hopeful picture of the future. The notion that a war between Russia and America is inevitable within the next few decades, and that Britain, in its unfavorable geographical position, is bound to be blown to pieces by atomic bombs, is accepted with a sort of vague resignation, rather as people accept the statement that sooner or later the sun will cool down and we shall all freeze to death. The general public seems to have forgotten about the atomic bomb, which seldom figures in the news. Everyone is intent on having a good time, so far as our reduced circumstances permit. Football matches are attended by enormous crowds, pubs and picture-houses are always packed, and motoring has revived to a surprising extent considering that petrol is still theoretically rationed, the "basic" ration being only five gallons a month. Secondhand cars sell for fantastic prices, and extraordinary objects, some of them twenty or thirty years old, are to be seen puffing along on the roads. The forgery of petrol coupons is said to have reached such a pitch that the authorities may actually give up rationing in despair. With some difficulty you can now buy a vacuum cleaner, but I still haven't seen a refrigerator for sale, and it would be impossible to furnish a house in even the barest way without spending hundreds of pounds and having to make do with a great deal of ugly and ill-made stuff. There is

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still, for instance, no crockery except the hideous "utility" ware or second-hand sets at impossible prices. The general scarcity makes everyone competitive about small possessions, and when you succeed in buying something like a wristwatch or a fountain pen you boast of it for weeks afterwards. The snob note is definitely returning to the advertisements, and in spite of the all-round shabbiness one can feel a sort of quiet pressure to make people dress in a more formal manner again. The other day when I was passing St. Paul's some kind of ceremony was going on, and I was interested to see top hats in fairly large numbers, for the first time in six years or more. But they were rather mangy-looking top hats, and the aspect of the crowd was such that I could not tell whether the function was a wedding or a funeral.

Very little to report on the literary front. The newspapers are still at their reduced size and likely to remain so for some time to come, but there are constant rumours of the starting of two or three new evening papers and of a new weekly political review of the type of the *New Statesman* or *Tribune*. Books are as scarce and easy to sell as ever. Most of the time I can't even buy copies of my own books. Scissors-and-paste anthologies and miscellanies continue to appear in great numbers, and since I wrote to you last a whole lot more literary monthlies and quarterlies have come into being. Most of these are poor little things and unlikely to live long, but the kind of streamlined, high-powered, slickly got-up, semi-intellectual magazine which you are familiar with in the USA is now beginning to appear here also. Two recent example are *Future* and *Contact*. Hatry, the financial wizard, who went into the book trade after he came out of prison, is said to be behind some of these new ventures. Thoughtful people watch these developments with dismay, but it is clear that you can only get a large circulation for the kind of magazine in which the letterpress exists round the edges of photographs, and which gives the average reader the feeling of being "advanced" without actually forcing him to think. It is also well known that a great part of the British periodical press is hopelessly antiquated, and that if it does not modernise itself it may be suddenly supplanted by any magazines which the Americans may decide to start over here. The "digest" type of magazine is more and more popular, and even the Central Office of Information (previously the M.O.I.) runs magazines of this type in numerous languages for distribution in Europe. In the BBC what may possibly turn out to be an important change is taking place. After years of struggle it has been decided to set aside one wavelength for intelligent programmes. One of the great troubles of broadcasting in this country has been that no programme is regarded as economic unless it can appeal to millions of people, and that anything in the smallest degree highbrow provokes storms of indignation from ordinary radio users, who claim that the time they pay for is being wasted on stuff that can only appeal

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to a small minority. Also, as the BBC is a chartered corporation and, during the war, has been heavily subsidised by the government, it is subject to a great deal of ignorant and hostile criticism in Parliament, of which its directors are terrified. If the highbrow stuff is isolated in a separate wavelength where the average listener who keeps his radio tuned in to the Home Service for twenty-three hours a day need not be bored by it, much of the criticism will drop off and the more intelligent people inside the BBC may get a free hand. As I well know, there are in the BBC, mostly in its lower ranks, many gifted people who realise that the possibilities of radio have not yet been explored and cannot be explored unless one is content with a minority audience. However, although it is claimed that the "C" programmes (ie. those on the separate wavelength) will be highly experimental and almost completely uncensored, the people ultimately in charge of them are still high-up permanent officials of the BBC, so it may be that no real change is contemplated.

I can't think of any more news. It is a beautiful spring, with everything in bloom very early. The railings round the parks have not been restored, but the statues are returning to their pedestals. London looks as shabby and dirty as ever, but even after an interval of a year the cessation of the blackout is still an acute pleasure.

GEORGE ORWELL

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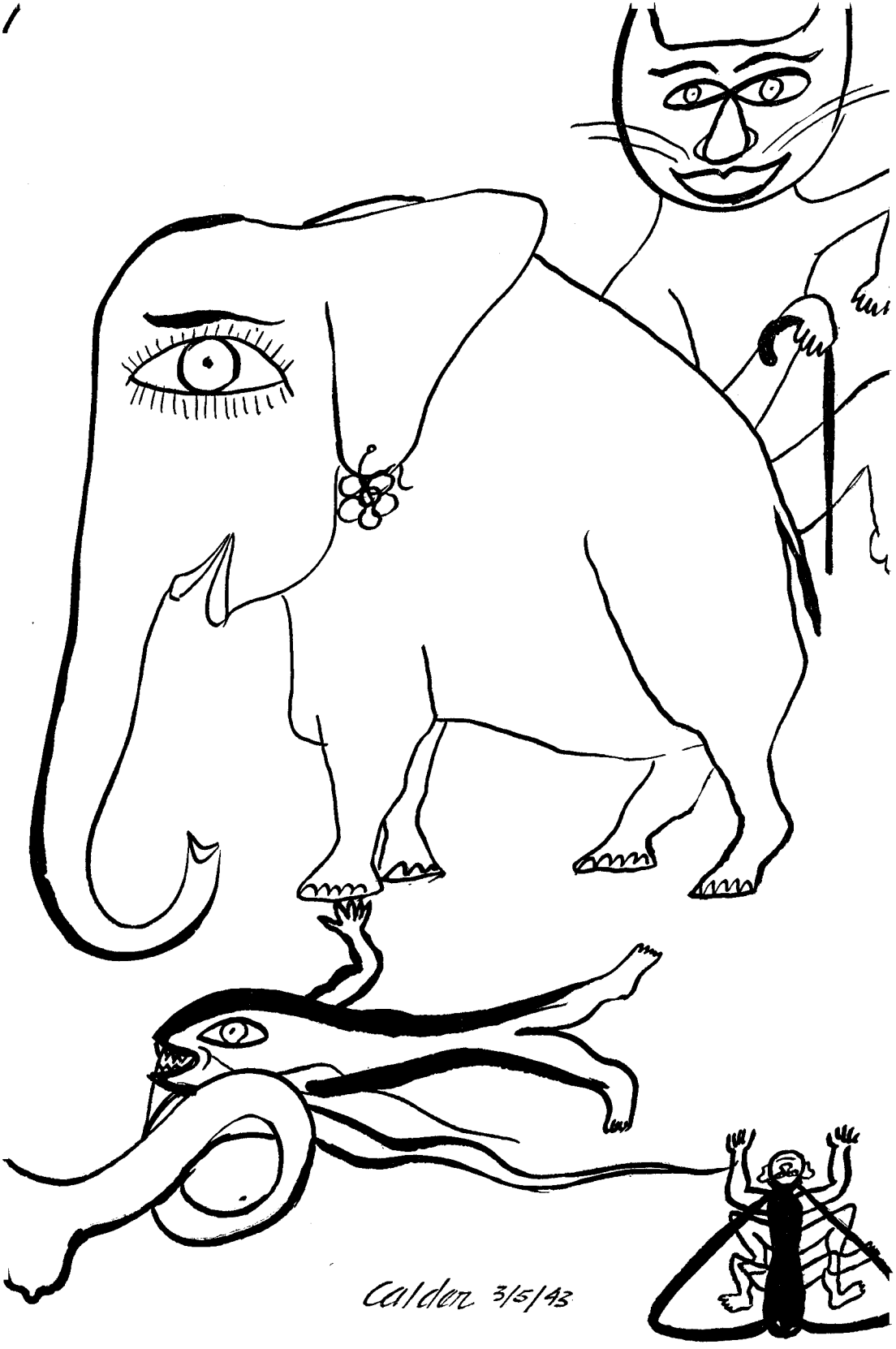

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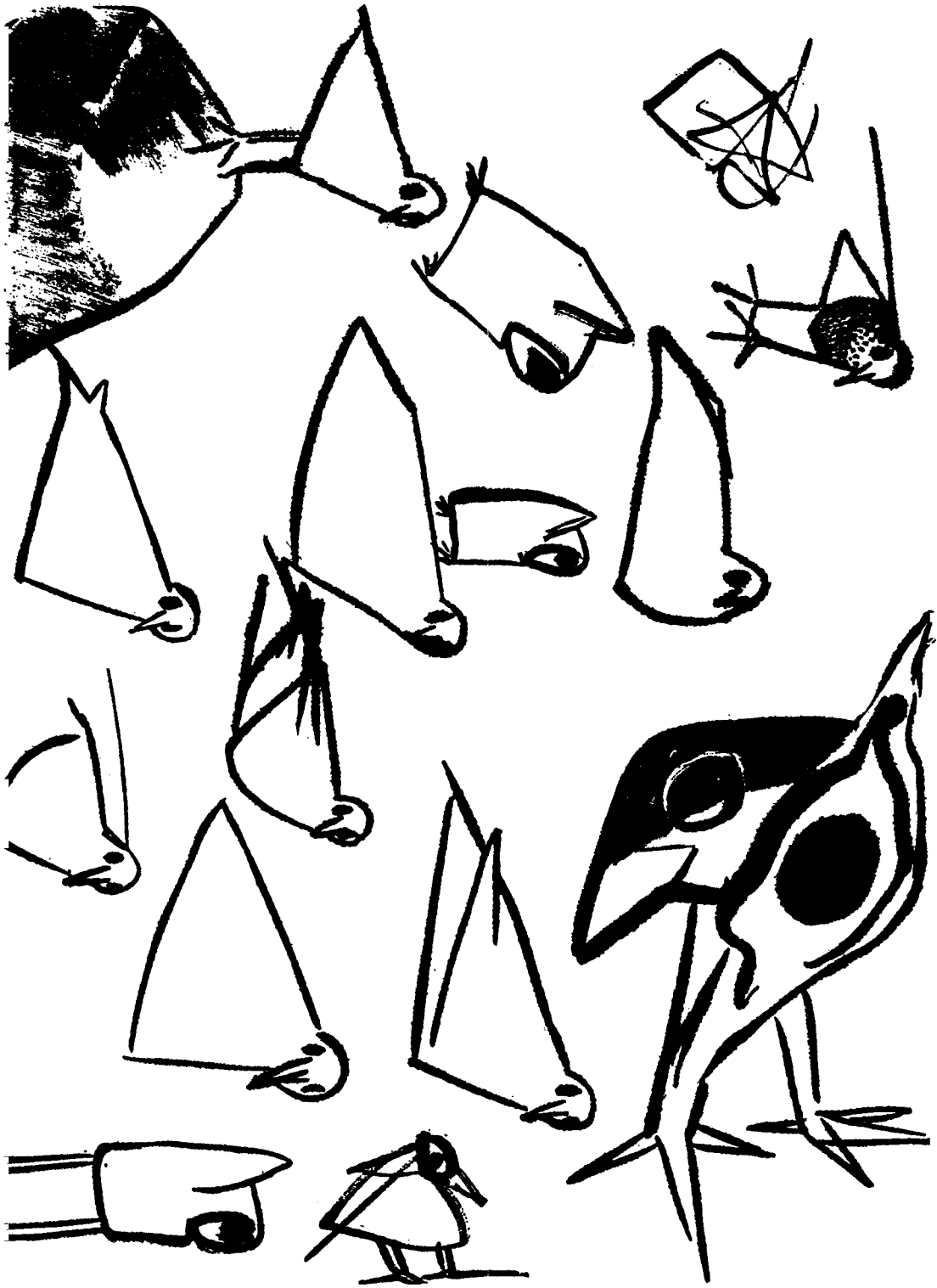

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Pyrrhus and Cyneas*

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

GOD

"God wills it." This motto shielded the Crusaders from Cyneas' questions. The conquests of the Christian warriors were not, like those of Pyrrhus, an unprofitable excursion, if God willed them. The will of God cannot be surpassed; in him man finds the ultimate goal of his efforts, since beyond him there is nothing. The necessity of the divine being reflects upon those actions which have their end in him and redeems them for eternity. But what does God will?

If God is infinity and plenitude of being, in him there is no interval between the project and its realization. What he wills is; what is, he wills. His will is but the immovable creation of being; as yet it can scarcely be called will. Such a God is not an individual; he is the universal, the all, the firm, the eternal. And the universal is silence. He asks no return, he makes no promises, he demands no sacrifice, he dispenses neither rewards nor punishments, he can justify nothing and condemn nothing; on him neither optimism nor despair may be set; he is: beyond that nothing can be said about it. The perfection of his being leaves no room for man. To transcend oneself in an object, is to establish it; but how establish that which already *is*? Man could not transcend himself in God, if God is premised as wholly complete. Man then is only an accident immaterial to the surface of being; on the earth he is like the explorer lost in the desert; he may go to right or left, or where he desires, he will never arrive anywhere and the sand will cover all trace of him. If he wishes to give direction to his actions he should not address this indifferent, impersonal God; his motto should be that on the pediment of the abbey at Thelema: "Do what thou wilt." If God wills all that is, man has but to act, no matter how. As the heretic Amalrician sect said, in the twelfth century: "When one is in God's hand, one has no care for what one has to do, one has no remorse for what one has done." And they passed their lives in joyful dissipation.

The church burnt the Amalricians with great ceremony. Nevertheless there exists a Catholic naturalism which extends the blessing of God

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* The following selections are from the existentialist essay by that title.

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through the whole earth; we find the echo of it, for example, in a man like Claudel; all things come from God; then all is good and man has no need to turn away from the world; he even has great difficulty in perverting this pre-destination within himself, for he is the creature of God; it is difficult to err, since what is, is good. But an orthodox Christian avoids going to the limits of such a thought: "Ah! Dear Madame," as the greedy and worldly cleric said, sitting down at table, "would God have invented all these good things if he had not wished us to eat them?" But he carefully forgets that God invented woman also. There was an old lady who refused with horror to put butter into her boiled egg. "I eat it just as the good God made it," she declared, reaching for the salt.

"We will pray to God, with his whole works!" wrote Claudel. "He does nothing in vain and nothing which might be harmful to our salvation." If the works of God are wholly good, then they are entirely designed for human salvation; they are not an end in themselves, but a means which has its justification in our employment of it. But how then are we to know if the melon was really created as a family dish? Perhaps it may have been created in order not to be eaten; perhaps this world's goods are only useful because man has the power to refuse them; just as St. Francis of Assisi smiled upon the world without enjoying it. "For everything you have nought but praise," said the archaeologist to the Regent of Naples in Claudel's *Soulier de Satin*. "But it annoys me to see that you don't use anything." However, the Regent gives him these riches for which he has no use, and to give something is a way of using it; asceticism is another form of enjoyment; whatever he may do man makes use of worldly goods for it is through them that he achieves his gain or loss. He must then decide what to do with them. His decision will not be defined in the aim, because all use is superseding, and superseding does not exist anywhere; it is not, it has to be. What has it to be?

It has to be, says the Christian, in conformity with the will of God.

One must, then, renounce all naturalism, nothing being good but virtue; evil is sin, and virtue submission to the divine requirements. So God has requirements; he waits for man to turn to him. He has created man that a being might exist who should not be premised but should fulfil his being according to his creator's desire. The will of God appears thus to be an appeal to man's liberty; it requires something which has to come to be, which is not yet; it is a scheme, it is the transcending of a being which has to become its being, which is not. An understanding between God and man then is conceivable; in so far as God is not all he has to be, man can establish him; he finds his place again in the world, he is in his place by relationship to God; and that is how God appears to be in relation to man. It is this which the German mystic Angelus Silesius expressed when he wrote: "God has need of me, just as I of Him." The Christian finds himself in the presence of a personal and

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living God *for* whom he can act; but in this case God is no longer the absolute, the universal; he is this false infinity of which Hegel speaks, which allows the finite to exist in his presence, separate from himself. He is for man a neighbor.

This definite, individual God might satisfy the aspirations of human transcendence, he would be a concrete being in fact, complete and self contained, since he would exist; and at the same time indefinitely open, since his existence would be an endless transcending; he could not be surpassed, since he would be himself a continual surpassing, and man would only be able to bear company to his transcending, without ever transcending him. When I have accomplished the will of God a new will will seize me and there will never be any "after."

Only the will of this God is no longer implicit in things, because it is no longer the will of what is, but of what has to become. It is no longer the will of all, and man must discover its individual aspect. To desire the will of God, this quite formal decision does not dictate a single action to man. Does God will that the believer should massacre the infidel and burn the heretic, or that he should tolerate their faith? That he should make war, or conclude peace? Does he will capitalism, or socialism? What is the temporal, human face of the eternal will? Man aspires to transcend himself in God, but he never transcends himself save in the midst of existence; it is on earth that man must achieve his redemption. Which, among earthly enterprises, will lift him to heaven? "Let us listen to the voice of God" says the believer, "he will himself tell us what he expects from us." But such a hope is naive. Only through an earthly voice can God manifest himself, because our ears hear no other; but then how are we to recognize its divine nature? They asked a woman suffering from hallucinations to identify the interlocutor who spoke to her over mysterious waves. "He says he is God" she answered primly, "but I don't know him." Moses might have met the voice that came from the burning bush with the same mistrust, or that which chid him at the summit of Sinai. Whether the voice emanates from a cloud, from a church, from the mouth of a confessor, it is always through an actual presence in the world that the transcendental has to manifest; its transcendancy will always escape us. Even in my heart, this command which I hear is ambiguous, it is the source of Abraham's anguish which Kierkegaard describes in *Fear and Trembling;* who is to know whether it is a demoniac temptation or my pride? Is it indeed God who is speaking? Who will distinguish between saint and heretic? It is, too, that uncertainty described for us by Kafka in *The Castle;* man can receive messages, even see the messenger; but is he not an impostor? And does he himself know who sends him? Has he not forgotten half his message on the way? This letter which he hands me, is it genuine and what is its meaning? The Messiah says that he is the Messiah, the counterfeit

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Messiah says the same; who is to distinguish between them? They can be recognized only by their works, but how shall we decide whether these works are good or evil? We will decide in the name of a human good. Thus every ethic proceeds, which attempts to justify itself by divine transcendence; it postulates a human good and affirms that it is desired by God because he is good. Claudel affirms that it is needful to prefer order to disorder because order is, while disorder is the negation of being; because order is intrinsically superior to disorder, we proclaim it as in conformity with the design of God. But Claudel forgets that, as Spinoza and Bergson showed, it is only man's viewpoint which makes order appear so; is Claudel's order that of God? There is bourgeois order, socialist order, democratic order, fascist order, and each is disorder in the eyes of its opponent. Every society claims always to have God on its side, it thus recreates him in its own likeness; it is the society which speaks and not God. If I turn to myself for interrogation I hear only the beating of my own heart. The Catholic church and the Protestant individualist can rightly reproach each other with taking for divine inspiration the echo of their personal convictions. Neither outside myself nor within me shall I meet God himself; never shall I see any celestial sign traced upon the earth; if it is so traced, it is terrestrial. Man cannot be illumined by God, it is by man that one would try to illumine God. It is through man that the call of God will always be heard, and it is through human enterprise that man will answer to that call. So God if he existed would be powerless to guide human transcendence. Man never stands but before men, and that presence or absence at the back of the sky does not concern him.

ACTION

This then is my position in regard to other men; men are free, and I am flung into the world amid these alien liberties. I have need of others for once I have passed my own goal my actions would recoil on themselves inert, useless, were they not carried by new projects towards a new future. A man who would survive a universal cataclysm alone upon the earth, would have to try, like Ezekiel, to revive humanity, or he would have no recourse but to die. The movement of my transcendence appears to me vain as soon as I have gone beyond it, but if my transcendence continually prolongs itself through others, beyond the aim which I am at present formulating, I shall never be able to transcend it.

In order to enable my transcendence to be transcended, it would be necessary for all humanity to extend my aims towards ends which were my own; who then would transcend it? Outside of this there would be none, all humanity would be my accomplice and none might judge me. But this hope must be foregone; men are separate and opposed. I must be resolved for the fight.

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But for *whom* shall I fight? My end is to attain being; let us reiterate, this is not a question of egoism; the concept of interest reposes on the concept of a completed self, towards which my subjective self might transcend itself, taking it for a supreme objective; instead of aiming myself, by this scheme, towards different objectives of an I, which exists nowhere as given; to seek to be is to seek *the* being: for there is only being by virtue of the presence of a subjectivity which veils it, and perforce the essence of my subjectivity is that I press towards him. I struggle then for being. I struggle to possess this plaything, this jewel, to make this journey, to eat this fruit, to build this house. But that is not all. I dress up, I travel, I build, among men. I cannot live mewed up in an ivory tower. It is the error of such theories as those of art for art's sake to imagine that a poem or a picture is something self-sufficient and inhuman; it is an object made by man, for man. Certainly it is made neither for diversion nor for edification; it corresponds to and satisfies no prior necessity; it is the superseding of the past, a gratuitous and free invention; yet, in its newness, it demands understanding and justification, men must love it, desire it, and continue it. The artist cannot be detached from the condition of the men around him. His own flesh is in pawn to others. Then I will fight, that free men may give the necessary place to my actions and my works.

But how return at this point to the struggle, since these men ought to give me support of their own free will? It is absurd, certainly, to wish to obtain spontaneous admiration and love by violent means: we laugh at Nero who wished to seduce by force. I desire that others should recognize the validity of my actions, that they should do their best for them by reckoning with them for the future; but I cannot expect a like recognition if from the start I contradict the schemes of others; they will only view me as an obstacle. My calculation is bad if I compel any man to live when he would rather die, under the pretext of needing a companion who should justify my existence; he will live to be my slanderer. Respect for the liberty of others is no abstract rule; it is a prime condition for the success of my efforts. I can only appeal for it to the liberty of others, not achieve it by constraint; I can invent the most pressing appeals and attempt to charm men, but they will remain free, whatever I may do, to answer or to ignore these appeals.

Only, to establish this relationship with others, two conditions are necessary. First that I should be allowed to appeal. So I would fight against those who would stifle my voice, would prevent my self-expression and hinder my existence. In order that I might exist with free men I should often be obliged to treat certain men as mere things. The prisoner will kill his gaoler in order to rejoin his comrades; it is a pity that the gaoler cannot be a comrade too, but it would be the more a pity if the prisoner never had a comrade again.

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So I must have with me men who *for me* are free, who can respond to my appeal.

In every situation men are entirely free since the situation exists to be superseded, and for that all have equal liberty. An ignoramus who tries to educate himself is free, equally with a scientist who invents a new hypothesis. We equally respect in every being the free effort to transcend himself towards being; what is incomprehensible is the renunciation of freedom. We cannot know how to establish any moral hierarchy among human situations. Only, so far as I am concerned, there are certain of these transcendences which I can transcend and which crystallize for me as objectives; there are others which I can but equal, or which transcend me. Tess d'Urbeville loves Clare; the three farm girls who also love Clare do not transcend the love of Tess; with Tess they transcend themselves towards Clare. But if we discover Clare's weaknesses, if we do not love her while we recognize Tess's liberty we only see in her love something foreign to us. The liberty of others only exists separately from me in so far as it tends towards an alien end or one already transcended. The ignoramus who uses his state of liberty to overcome his state of ignorance can do nothing for the physician who has just invented a complicated theory. The sick person who exhausts himself fighting against his illness, or the slave against his slavery, care neither for poetry nor for astronomy nor for the perfection of aviation; they first need health, leisure, security, free disposal of themselves. The freedom of others has only value for me if my aims can in their turn serve them for a point of departure; it is by use of the tool which I made that others extend its existence; the scientist can only talk with men who have reached a degree of knowledge equal to his own; then he presents his theory to them as a basis for new work. Another can only equal my transcendence if he is at the same stage on the road as I.

Lest our cries be lost in empty space I must have men near me who are ready to hear me; and these men must be my peers. I cannot retreat because the movement of my transcendence carries me unceasingly forward, and I cannot move alone towards the future; I should lose myself in a waste where I should journey in vain. Then I must try to create such circumstances for men that they can accompany me and surpass my transcendence; I need them to be free to make use of me, and in surpassing me to preserve me. I ask for mankind health, knowledge, well-being and leisure, so that their liberty may not be employed in fighting off sickness, ignorance and poverty.

Thus it is necessary that man should begin in two converging directions: he establishes objectives where he finds the concept of his transcendency crystallized; and he transcends himself by a forward movement which is his very liberty; at each step he tries to draw mankind to him. He is like the commander of an expedition who plans a new route for

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his march, and who constantly returns to collect the stragglers, moving forward afresh to lead the advance guard of his posse. Only all mankind does not agree to follow; some stay where they are or go by other ways; some even try to halt their march and that of those behind. At the point where persuasion fails, for self-defense only violence remains.

In a sense violence is not an evil, because one has no power either for or against a man; to beget a child is not to create it; to kill a man is not to destroy him; we harm nothing but the manifestation of others. But it is precisely in choosing to work upon this manifestation that we renounce the accepting of other men as one of our liberties, and we furthermore diminish the possibilities of expansion of our being; the man to whom I do violence is not my peer, and I need men to be my peers. Resort to violence arouses the less regret according as it appears less possible to appeal from it to the liberty of him who is violated; we use force without scruple towards sick people and infants. But if I did violence to all, I should stand alone in the world, lost. If I make a human group into a herd, cattle, by so much I reduce the human domain. And even if I oppress one single man, in him all humanity becomes for me a mere thing; if man is an ant which can without scruple be crushed, all men together are but an antheap. Therefore recourse to violence cannot be lightly accepted; it is the mark of a defeat which nothing can atone. If the universal ethics of Kant and Hegel were reached through optimism, it is because denying individuality, they also denied the defeat. But the individual exists; the defeat exists. If one scrupulous at heart hesitates before taking a political decision, it is not because the problems of politics are difficult, it is because they are insoluble. And further, abstention is also impossible; one always acts. Because we are condemned to violence we are destined to defeat; we are condemned to violence because man is divided and opposed to himself, because men are separate and opposed among themselves: violence will make a child into a man, a horde into a society. To renounce the fight would be to renounce transcendence, to renounce being. But in the meantime no success will ever efface the utter scandal of each separate defeat.

We should not think that success consists in tranquilly attaining an aim; our objectives are only and always new starting points. When we have brought others to this objective, everything begins; where does one go from there? I am not content with the idea that one will always go somewhere. I wish it to be *my* project which is continued. Each one must decide how far his project goes without destruction: was Kant rediscovered in Hegel? Or would he have regarded the Hegelian system as his negation? To answer, we must know what in his view was the basic truth of his philosophy. But his project did not in any case extend to infinity; if Kant had simply wanted philosophy he would have had no need to write, for the philosophy already existed; he wished for *a*

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philosophy created by a philosophic unfoldment which should be his own. We wish in our individuality to be indispensable, and this we only can be by means of individual projects. We are dependent on others' liberty: they can forget us, misunderstand us, use us for aims which are not our own. It is significant of the "trial" described by Kafka that no verdict is ever closed, we live in a condition of indefinite compounding. It is also indicated in M. Blanchot's epigram in *Aminadab*: The important thing is not to lose, but we never win. We have to undertake our activities in uncertainty and risk and it is exactly there that the essence of liberty lies; it is not decided by the grant of a post-dated salvation, it is signatory to no pact with the future; if it could be defined by the term envisaged it would no longer be liberty: but an aim is never a term, it remains open upon the infinite; it is only an end because liberty halts there and thus defines my individual being in the midst of formless infinity. My concern is only to attain my end, the rest no longer concerns me. What another will create, starting from me, will be his affair and not mine. I only act in assuming the risks of this future; they are the obverse of my finite existence and I am free in acknowledging my limitations.

So man can act and must act. He exists only in transcending himself. By risks and defeats he acts. The risk he has to take; in flinging himself towards the uncertainty of the future, he establishes with certainty the present. But the defeat cannot be assumed.

(*Translated from the French by Christopher Freemantle*)

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Notes on the Study of Myth

RICHARD CHASE

FOR TWENTY years or more there has been a general feeling that creative literature should be brought closer to myth. The resources of naturalism, aestheticism and symbolism have come to seem insufficient for modern literature, and these disciplines have been superseded, or at least modified, by the search for myth. I say "the search for myth" because the new mythological literature—the work of Eliot, Yeats, Mann, Joyce, Toynbee, Freud and others—has been able to make only a few tentative steps. I should like to say at the outset that I agree with the general opinion: our creative literature *should* be brought closer to myth.

In this short essay I do not intend to offer a theory of myth but only to suggest some restrictions on such a theory. These days the word "myth" is thrown about as cavalierly as is any word which the cultural climate envelops with glamor and charges with an emotional voltage. It is a powerful word, but not precise. Let me set down some of the more serious remarks about myth which I have encountered recently. In an essay on Mann and his use of myth (PARTISAN REVIEW, 1938) and in a subsequent controversy with James Burnham, William Troy wrote that myth is "a mode of cognition," that "myth, like science, is at once a method and a body of ordered experience." We need a new myth, he wrote in effect, to replace the narrow and now harmful nineteenth century world-view of science and progress; especially as a method of criticizing and creating literature is myth far superior to science. In retrospect, Troy's account of myth seems gratifyingly sensitive, but it was excessively metaphysical. His loose phraseology allowed Burnham to leap in with the accusation that Troy, and Mann, were proposing that we "revert" to a primitive dogma or absolute world-view which would smother science. Burnham held that science was the best weapon with which to attack those basic dilemmas of modern culture posed by Mann himself. More recently Mark Schorer, in the *Kenyon Review* (Autumn, 1942) wrote that "a myth is a large controlling image . . . which gives philosophic meaning to the facts of ordinary life." Myth, he says, is the "indi-

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spensable substructure" of poetry, an opinion which I take it he shares with T. S. Eliot. Joseph Campbell, in his appendix to the recent edition of *Grimm's Fairy Tales,* supposes that myth is a system of metaphysics: it is a "revelation of transcendental mysteries;" it is "symbolic of the spiritual norm for Man the Microcosm." These are ideas which at least have the advantage of being as old as the Stoics, or older. Finally, the surrealist Jacques B. Brunius, writing in last Spring's PARTISAN REVIEW, tells us that "the creation of a modern myth coincides with the problem of knowledge," and he contrasts the modern myth which he hopes to see created with the "myths" of "Egypto-Graeco-Roman paganism", Christianity and contemporary Statism. I do not propose to criticize these writers separately—they are all suggestive in varying degrees. But I do feel that one ought to object to the assumption they all explicitly or implicitly make: Namely, *that myth is philosophy—that it is a system of metaphysical or symbolic thought, that it is a theology, a body of dogma, or a world-view, that it is in direct opposition to science, is indeed the other side of the scientific coin.* To make these assumptions, or any one of them, is to make of myth something it has never been; to make them is to commandeer the word "myth" and apply it to something for which there are more exact, though less fashionable words. To make them is to burden myth with a task it cannot by itself perform. If we persist in this interpretation we are bound for another huge disappointment: "myth" will become as empty a word as some of those for which we now substitute it. Our pretensions will have to be more modest, our conclusions more tentative if there is to be any pungency in our understanding and use of myth.

The fact is that the simplest meaning of the Greek word "myth" is the right one: *a myth is a story, myth is narrative or poetic literature.* It need be no more philosophic than any other kind of literature. Myth is therefore art and must be studied as such. Myth is a mode of cognition, a system of thought, a way of life, only as art is. It can be opposed to science only as art is opposed to science. There is no question of one defeating the other. They are complementary and fulfill different needs. The romantic fear that science may destroy myth betrays an acquiescence in the misinterpretation of myth which science sometimes gives us: namely that it is frivolous or delicate nonsense. There are no eras in recorded history when science has banished myth: though there *are* eras when human thought in general has become superficial. When science is psychologically adequate, it can be shown to have much in common with myth. The best modern

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proof of this is Freud's reassertion of the natural validity of myth.*

The definition of myth as art will be disappointing only to those who refuse to grant art a primary function and efficacy in human thought but must always make it dependent on something else—theological dogma, religion, the State, economics, science. Myth is not the "indispensable substructure" of poetry. Poetry is the indispensable substructure of myth. Myth is a less inclusive category than poetry. Poetry *becomes* myth when it performs a certain function, an idea which Vico entertained and one which, as I shall at least hint, is abundantly affirmed by modern anthropology.

The Relevance of Primitive Myth. We often confuse myth with those hypostatized versions of myth which have come down to us in European literature, "mummified in priestly wisdom," says Malinowski, and "enshrined in the indestructible but lifeless repository of dead religions." We have thus gained the impression that myth is more systematic, less naive and functional than it is. Those writers who tell us that myth is a system of recondite symbols, that it is a pseudo-scientific explanation of nature or that it describes the sun and the moon, reaffirm this impression. We must study myth as it works in primitive society, before it is overlaid with interpretation.

In primitive culture myth is a relatively clearly definable activity instead of being diffused and obscured by other activities as it is in our culture. Nevertheless we usually overestimate the difference between primitive culture and our own. It is perhaps trite to observe that we are more like primitive men than we once thought, but not so trite to observe that primitive men are more like *us* than we once thought. Only one specific point can be made here: The idea of a primitive "mythopoeic age" in which all thought was mystic or symbolic and in which all literature was equally and completely mythical must be abandoned. All the primitive peoples who have been studied by anthropologists have treated a part of their experience matter-of-

* Nothing could more palpably suggest the complementary functions myth and science may assume than the fact that Freud became a myth-maker and a profound student of myth *reluctantly*. His scientific temperament rebelled at every step; yet it forced him into the realm of myth. Jung, for whom mythology is a welcome escape from the rigors of science, is, compared with Freud, a vaporous and fruitless mythologist. (When I speak of Freud as a mythologist, I do not refer to the arbitrary collection of symbols which he erroneously supposed to be common to myths and dreams; I refer rather to his treatment of psychic forces and his reconstructions of the tensions, displacements, and conceptualizations which make images in both myths and dreams).

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factly, just as we do. Primitive thought is in some ways *more* mythical than civilized thought. But the psychoanalyst's analogy with the development of the individual does not hold. We do not simply "revert" to an outgrown stage of fantasy by trying to make our literature more mythical. This is also a problem of maturity, of living better in the present, and of going on to the future. All cultures are capable of making myth. We study primitive culture because it clarifies certain psychological processes of concentration and revivification upon which depends our proceeding into the future.

Vico tells us that he thought of myth as a clear, deep river which in modern times flows into the ocean but retains its purity for a certain distance before being swallowed up. We should rather think of myth as a river which flows eternally; sometimes it is clear and deep but sometimes it becomes shallow and muddy by having to flow over broad flatlands.

Myth and Religion. If we mean by "religion" the whole magico-religious complex of primitive culture then myth is indeed closely allied with religion. If on the other hand we mean moral theism or dogmatic theology, or even a pantheon of gods, myth must be recognized as the enemy of religion. The clear-cut, powerful god, the celestial abstraction, the theological synthesis have always been subverted by the humanizing leaven of myth. The gods of myth, as Herbert Spencer observed, are always "running down from Olympus." The grandiose South Seas and Greek myths about the sky and the earth being separated by their divine sons are not religious philosophy—they are tales of men tearing their parents apart.

Myth and Magic. Myth is much more akin to the naive assumptions and techniques of magic than to religion. Magic does not of itself imagine discreet spirits or deities, but only efficacious preternatural forces residing in objects, animals and men, which can be manipulated by human compulsion. Myth should be thought of as a dramatic picturization of magical forces as they clash, interact or harmonize with each other.

Myth and Folktale. The traditional idea that myths were primeval philosophies of nature and that the folktales of wonderful animals and birds, magical objects, lost children, young heroes, enchanted forests and so on were degenerate or misread popular versions of the myths was accepted down to the last years of the nineteenth century.

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The theory of evolution, on the other hand, led to the conclusion that myths had developed out of folktales in accordance with the general evolutionary process. The American anthropologists accept neither of these views. In the writings of Boas, for example, we learn that the folktale is a permanent and universal form of literature and that what are usually called myths are to be thought of as folktales which have been elaborated upon by specially gifted individuals. Several formal distinctions have been made between myth and folktale; but these distinctions are almost completely confounded by the literature of primitive peoples as it actually exists. Primitive literature should be thought of primarily as folktale; once this has been grasped we are in a position to observe that folktales have sometimes been remodeled by story-tellers of religious or philosophic temperament. By far the most useful definition of myth is one which cuts across formal distinctions and says, Myth is any kind of literature which functions in a certain way to the fulfilment of certain ends.

Some Functions of Myth. In what follows I shall try to do two things at once: show how literature becomes myth in primitive culture and suggest how our literature, especially our poetry, may become mythical. Obviously I shall have to leave several large questions unanswered. What I say is suggestion only.

Myth must always discover and accept preternatural forces; it must always reaffirm the efficacy of the preternatural and insulate it from the ordinary world. Here a note of definition: the word "supernatural" is often used in discussions of myth, sometimes with the necessary qualifications, oftener without. But there are at least two objections to "supernatural": it implies a philosophical distinction between two realms of being which are unknown to the myth-maker and it has certain misleading theological overtones. I therefore use the word "preternatural," by which I mean to indicate no more or less than is conveyed by the Melanesian word *mana*; whatever has impersonal magic force or potency and is therefore extraordinarily beautiful, terrible, dangerous, awful, wonderful, uncanny or marvelous has *mana* and is, in our sense of the word, preternatural. Myth shows us reality set afire with our own emotions. In this sense myths do not show us what is *less* than ordinarily natural; they show us what is *more* than ordinarily natural. This function may be regarded as a given fact which holds true of all myth and of much poetry. But not all literature which deals with the preternatural is myth.

Literature becomes mythical by suffusing the natural with pre-

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ternatural force toward certain ends, by capturing the impersonal forces of the world and directing them toward the fulfilment of certain emotional needs. Within this broad definition, we may notice three functions of myth.

1. In his *Myth in Primitive Psychology* Malinowski discusses especially those serious primitive tales which include statements about the origin of man or which comment on his rituals and social institutions. These commonly invoke what the savage conceives as a primeval period of the world. This was a time of wonderful magic; it is a special projection into the past of the preternatural forces which in other stories (particularly those usually labelled folktales) are represented as ever present and capable of effective interference in the life of man. The serious myth, says Malinowski, is "a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality." This primeval reality is for the moment more relevant to human problems than the reality of the ordinary world; and the myths are told in order to preserve the meaningfulness and purposefulness of social customs and institutions. They "come into play when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality, and sanctity." There can be no doubt that these myths sometimes have the efficacy of dogma. But unlike dogma they are plastic and dynamic. They look to the present and the future. As Malinowski says, they are made *ad hoc* and are "constantly regenerated." No one deduces a way of life from the myths; they are not a canon of behavior or thought. The way of life is given; the myths are life grown literary.

The myths discussed by Malinowski, however, have mostly social and moral functions. Myths, both serious and playful, have a more purely psychological function.

2. Our culture provides innumerable substitutes for what William James called "the pungent sense of effective reality," the sense of "the possibilities of nature." Much of primitive man's life—like much of ours—is spent in apathy and routine; yet primitive man is capable of a precise and dynamic attention which we can equal only with great difficulty. Primitive culture, writes Goldenweiser, is "dynamic and vibrant;" it has to be, like any other organism for which survival is a perpetual ordeal. Our society allows us to let the world run down, grow cold and inoperative, without exposing ourselves to danger. But to primitive man a vibrant sense of present reality is vitally necessary. Paul Radin shows in his *Primitive Man as Philosopher* that to the savage reality is pragmatic.The world is not a museum of objects or a textbook of science; it is a theater of dynamic activities, of richly mys-

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terious powers, of ends accomplished by forces analogous to human emotions and subject to partial control by magic compulsion. To most savages, gods and spirits exist only in an end accomplished; the spirits become brightly real or fade into impersonality as a desired effect is more or less successfully brought about. The world becomes vibrant in an end accomplished: as Radin says, the savage's world then becomes "a blaze of reality."

The idea of discreet spirits inhabiting and motivating objects is not primary as E. B. Tylor and Herbert Spencer thought; it is secondary and does not take into account the universal practice of magic. To the savage, *mana* or preternatural power is impersonal; he apprehends it as an immediate quality of things, just as color, sound, size, shape and motion are immediate qualities. As the savage envelops the world in his own emotions, things assume dramatic qualities: they are, in the words of Dewey, "poignant, tragic, beautiful, humorous, settled, disturbed, comfortable, annoying, barren, harsh, consoling, splendid, fearful; are such immediately and in their own right and behalf." Magic, and all the benefits it is supposed to bring, depends upon this fusion of power, quality and object: without it "things fall apart;" the world becomes chaotic and dangerous when it can no longer be enveloped in the tissue of human emotion. When objects and qualities become efficacious by being fused with power, they are subject to the compulsive techniques of magic. Besides being a compulsive technique—a pseudo-science as Frazer says—magic is obviously an aesthetic activity. Magic is immediately available to art, and art to magic. Primitive literature is shot through with magic and we may regard it as mythical when it fortifies the magical view of things, when it reaffirms the vibrant dynamism of the world, when it fortifies the ego with the impression that there is a magically potent brilliancy in the world. Myth is not vaporous, abstract, or unreal; it is a "blaze of reality."

3. Like other kinds of literature, myth performs the cathartic function of dramatizing the clashes and harmonies of life in a social and natural environment. But myth can be understood as the aesthetic leaven which heals or makes tolerable those deep neurotic disturbances which in primitive culture are occasioned by the clashing attitudes of magic and religion. This collision of forces, as Radin points out in his *Primitive Religion,* is partly the result of the priest's struggle to achieve a dominant economic position. Coincident with his war upon the people is his war against magic. For magic is the prerogative of mankind in general; it exalts human power; it places the world

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and the gods at the disposal of mankind. The priest's task is to transmute magic into religion, to overcome the subjectivism on which magic depends, to present spirits and gods as clearly conceived objective beings, to transfer magical power to the gods and make men obeisant before them. Mythology is full of the tensions created by this universal struggle, and many myths may be said to array the propaganda of men, animals, and magical beings against the propaganda of the gods. But art is constructive where life is destructive. Myth keeps the dilemma operative and resolves the contesting forces into useful experience.

Stated in somewhat abstract terms, magic, as Radin says, is the coercion of the objective world by the ego; religion is the coercion of the ego by the objective world, or by the powers and beings in the objective world. Now I suggest that when literature brings these opposing forces together so that they interact coercively toward a common end, literature has become mythical. This interpretation of myth, as it seems to me, is less immediately valuable to us than are the two interpretations I have offered above; it requires more thorough translation before it can be applied to our own problems. Yet the war between magic and religion still goes on, though sometimes under different names. Certain terms in which this "cathartic function" of myth might be restated will doubtless occur to any student of Freud.

Myths and Paramyths. I am aware that what has been said here cannot fully elucidate those processes of amalgamation by which the symbols, images, concepts and personified beings of myth are made—though a complete elaboration of what I have said would lead us a long way in that direction.

I am aware too that no complete account of myth can be undertaken without wider references to human needs and aspirations than those I have chosen here. The method of pragmatic naturalism seems to me the only fruitful method of studying myth—yet that method leaves us, as it often does, with the feeling that we have made art too resolutely functional, too outward looking, too optimistic. Psychoanalysis may be misleading as psychology, but "the pleasure principle" and the desperate "instincts" of sex and death give myth a dramatic richness unknown to contemporary pragmatism, or at least not yet assimilated by it.

I do not mean, either, to reduce the latitude of reinterpretation unduly. Those ever recurring writers who find the study of primitive thought somehow degrading or irrelevant are right at least when they

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say that the tales of the folk are often vague, dull or childish. We must be free, as was the primitive intellectual (who may be studied in Radin's *Primitive Man as Philosopher*), so to interpret a myth that it comes alive for us in the moral and intellectual context of our culture—as we have in our time interpreted the myths of Oedipus, Joseph and Philoctetes. This may require symbolism or allegory, certainly conscious intelligence. But we cannot assume a symbol, an allegory or a concept to be the same as the myth itself, or to be the only interpretation of the myth. Apart from the dictates of parochial cultural necessity, there remain constant human needs against which we must measure the adequacy of our interpretations.

Myth has often been philosophical, frequently in advanced cultures, less frequently in primitive cultures. We should not care, for example, to ignore the philosophical aspects of the Oedipus, Joseph or Philoctetes myths or of the myths which we find in the poems of Eliot or Yeats. These myths offer us patterns of feeling and thought. But we are likely to find in them not philosophy but (as Eliot says) the "emotional equivalent" of philosophy. We may be sure at least that the myth is never philosophical without being something else. Myth is, in the phrase of Renan, "simultaneous humanity."

And we have to remember that all myths begin with the apprehension of some marvelous activity or potentiality. Magic and literature meet in myth. An unusual stone, a strange animal, a witch doctor have *mana* for the savage just as do Oedipus for Sophocles or Freud, Joseph for Mann, the "great tomb-haunter" for Yeats, or Mme Sosostris for Eliot. Those concepts, allegories, symbols and theologies which are loosely called mythical are so only so long as they are still faithful to the emotional complexity of literature; for only literature can perform the mythical function of preserving and giving significance to the sensation of *mana*. Once disinherited from their literary matrix concepts are not, properly speaking, myths. I propose (following Herder) disinherited "mythical ideas" called *paramyths*.

Poetry as Myth. A myth is not "a large controlling image." The future of mythical poetry does not depend upon reconciling poetry with an image. It depends rather upon making of poetry something it is always striving against human bias and superficiality to become. The poetical imagination when it attains any consistent fire and efficacy is always displacing the texture of the mind into the external world so that it becomes a theater of preternatural forces. A certain control and direction given the poetical emotions, and poetry, as it always has, becomes mythical.

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THREE SONGS

THE SONG OF THE DEMENTED PRIEST

I put those things there.—See them burn.
The emerald the azure and the gold
Hiss and crack, the blues and greens of the world
As if I were tired. Someone interferes
Everywhere with me. The clouds the clouds are torn
In ways I do not understand or love.

Licking my long lips, I looked upon God
And he flamed and he was friendlier
Than you were, and he was small. Showing me
Serpents and thin flowers; these were cold.
Dominion waved and glittered like the flare
From ice under a small sun. I wonder.

Afterward the violent and formal dancers
Came out, shaking their pithless heads.
I would instruct them but I cannot now,—
Because of the elements. They rise and move,
I nod a dance and they dance in the rain
In my red coat. I am the king of the dead.

THE SONG OF THE YOUNG HAWAIIAN

Ai, they all pass in front of me those girls!
Blazing and lazy colours. The swaying sun
Brushes the brown tips of them stiffly softly
And whispers me: Never take only one
As the yellow men the white the foreigners do.—
No no, I dance them all.

The old men come to me at dusk and say
"Hang from their perches now the ruined birds;
They will fall. We hear strange languages.
Rarely a child sings now." They cough and say
"We are a dying race." Ai! should we be:
You will not marry me.

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Strengthless the old will of the elders' eyes.—
The green palms, the midnight sand, the creaming surf!
The sand at streaming noon is black. I swim
Farther than others for I swim alone.
—(Whom Nangganangga smashed to pieces on
The road to Paradise.)

YOUNG WOMAN'S SONG

The round and smooth, my body in my bath,
If someone else would like it too.—I did,
I wanted T. to think 'How interesting'
Although I hate his voice and face, hate both.
I hate this something like a bobbing cork
Not going. I want something to hang to.—

A fierce wind roaring high up in the bare
Branches of trees,—I suppose it was lust
But it was holy and awful. All day I thought
I am a bobbing cork, irresponsible child
Loose on the waters.—What have you done at last?
A little work, a little vague chat.

I want that £3.10 hat terribly.—
What I am looking for, *I am*, may be
Happening in the gaps of what I know.
The full moon *does* go with you as you go.
Where am I going? I am not afraid,—
Only I would be lifted lost in the flood.

JOHN BERRYMAN

THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

The gates clanged and they walked you into jail
More tense than felons but relieved to find
The hostile world shut out, the flags that dripped
From every mother's windowpane, obscene
The bloodlust sweating from the public heart,

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The dog authority slavering at your throat.
A sense of quiet, or pulling down the blind
Possessed you; punishment you felt was clean.

The decks, the catwalks and the narrow light
Composed a ship. This was a mutinous crew
Troubling the captain for plain decencies,
A *Mayflower* brim with pilgrims headed out
To establish new theocracies to west,
A Noah's ark coasting the topmost seas
Ten miles above the sodomites and fish.
These inmates loved the only living doves.

Like all men hunted from the world you made
A good community, voyaging the storm
To no safe Plymouth or green Ararat;
Trouble or calm, the men with Bibles prayed,
The thin politicals construed our hate.
The opposite of all armies you were best
Opposing uniformity and yourselves;
Prison and personality were your fate.

You suffered not so physically but knew
Maltreatment, hunger, ennui or the mind.
Well might the soldier kissing the hot beach
Erupting in his face damn all your kind.
Yet you who saved neither yourselves nor us
Are equally with those who shed the blood
The heroes of our cause. Your conscience is
What we come back to in the armistice.

KARL SHAPIRO

THE DEAD

If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?

The maze under the loess
Takes its tribute still. The pilgrims come and go
In Weimar, all the graves at Rome are green;
Here Abel lived a month, there Mendel kept his spade.
The world throws in its sack another skull.

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Knossos, Vienna
Are tumuli, the rust of the leaf-shaped sword.
The bulls that roared to its bare-breasted galaxy,
The starred faïence of the thalassocracy
Are the stamping waltzers of a Hapsburg wedding;

The Turks sweep up in their rout
The deaf ghost weeping for its graceless Karl.
The red brain unreels into its labyrinth
The thread of blood; and the beast's betrayer dreams
Over the horned, man's corpse—a Saviour.

And he too is history:
The charnel of the saved, the whitening
Sepulchre of the betrayed—of man's old agony:
All that is loved and does not love, that rises
Unmoved from the last contraction of his limbs.

Mazed in that great tomb
The soul grasps its last thread; beside the cypress tree
It chooses from the springs the spring of Memory,
Cries: "I am a child of Earth and Starry Heaven,
But my race is of Heaven alone." But its race is of Earth alone.

RANDALL JARRELL

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Film Chronicle

ONE THING about Shakespeare as a photoplay, you can hear the speeches better than in most productions. In Lawrence Olivier's *Henry V,* the blank verse is spoken very well. But otherwise this production is marked by a host of mixed intentions, a mixture fascinating in itself, but hardly faithful to the play or dedicated to a genuine version or paraphrase. For example, the intention of showing what Elizabethan stage conditions were joins with the effort to show what it may have been like to be seated in an Elizabethan audience. This is good in itself—the self-consciousness and the historical sense of modern literature and art has at last infected the makers of films—but it is not done with any system or, so far as I was able to make out, in relation to any coherent conception of the play. It is natural, then, that the rendering of stage conditions should become slapstick, as when the actor who plays the Archbishop of Canterbury slaps the boy actor for stuffing oranges in his false bosom. And it becomes a kind of period-slumming, for the applause of the Elizabethan audience is often naive, occurring at moments when the modern audience can feel superior and amused.

The sets are also the same kind of mixture. The camera moves back and forth between actual shots of a real countryside and contrived stage-sets vague as fogs and in the prevailing style of Christmas cards and calendar art. There are brilliant moments of straight photography, and the imitation of great art, as when one shot of the battlescene resembles Breughel's "The Road to Calvary." But at other times the background is crude as a vaudeville backdrop or it is just plain Technicolor.

The mixed intentions are most incompatible when the Chorus, introduced by Shakespeare *precisely because* the stage was inadequate to large-scale events, is illustrated gratuitously by the camera. This would not matter, were it not for the contrast between the descriptive power of the poetry and the triteness of the camera's description. The moral is perhaps that in a Shakespearean film, one ought not to try to help the best poet in English when he has chosen and used very well his own method for helping himself. Furthermore, the illustration as such is inconsistent too, for at times it attempts to render the Elizabethan production's makeshift methods and at other times it ranges all over like any true film.

From beginning to end, the medium of the film is irresistible to the director. And the medium's triumph becomes thrilling when the battle scene occurs and looks very much like the climax of a Western: the

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cavalry charge of the French becomes an Indian charge against embattled pioneers, and for a moment Olivier on his horse bears a clear resemblance to William S. Hart. So too toward the end the use of close-ups, which is very effective, shows what an overwhelming power the medium of the film exerts upon the imagination of anyone who makes a film, however great the interest in Shakespeare and the Elizabethan period. Once this tendency is noted, the most interesting aspect of the film is the struggle between Shakespeare's play and the medium of the screen. Sometimes Shakespearean passages are so profound that the film as such is disregarded; but sometimes the great set-pieces of movie-making—the firing of artillery (like the classic newsreel shot of a dreadnaught's salvoes) or the movement of large bodies of men and animals (like covered wagons lumbering on file toward the horizon)—transform Shakespeare into something which has nothing to do with his play; into passages which are digressions, however good; instead of extensions of the text. Yet the camera and the text collaborate very well in one important scene, the scene in which the king moves anonymously among his men on the night before Agincourt, listening to their emotions about the war and arguing with them about his responsibility for their lives and deaths. Here the camera, by submitting itself to the drama, performs like the accompanist of a great singer, and achieves more through the close-up than would have been possible on the stage.

For the most part, however, the conflicts between the nature of the text and the nature of the medium are such that the review in *Time* is difficult to understand. *Time*'s review was full of remarkable perceptions but also full of an exalted over-estimation, as if the reviewer had just discovered Shakespeare, or found out that he was as good as he was supposed to be. How can it be said that the entire conception of the film is anti-naturalistic when the camera, more naturalistic than any other medium, attempts literal exactitude so often? Moreover, the very effort to represent Elizabethan stage conditions is a form of naturalism.

Certainly this production does much to clarify the problems of translating Shakespeare to the screen. I should guess that one rich possibility might be cartoons in black-and-white, where attention would be fixed upon the dramatic poetry as such and a true anti-naturalism would be the starting-point. The underlying attitudes of the producers are also worth guessing about. Made during the war, the film displays a pride and love of England and the English countryside (although the actual countryside filmed by the camera is Ireland!), and the exultant patriotism of the invasion of France suggests D-Day more than Agincourt. But above all, the pride and love in the possession of Shakespeare ought to induce reflections about the fate of prestige in our society, for Shakespeare is not really a money-maker at present, but many people think well of him.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

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MODERN EVIDENCE

From Franz Kafka's Diary*

1917

September 15. In so far as you have a chance at all, you have the chance of making a beginning. Do not waste it. You will be unable to draw back from the filth that will well up from your depths when you try to force an entrance. But do not wallow in it. If the wound in your lung is only a symbol, as you maintain, a symbol of a wound inflamed by F.** and measured in depth by your expiation—if this is so, then the medical advice (light, air, sun, rest) is a symbol too. Hold on to this symbol.

Oh, beautiful hour, masterful equipoise, garden grown wild. You turn out of your house, and on the garden-path the goddess of joy rushes toward you.

Majestic apparition, Prince of the Realm.

And so I would entrust myself to death. Remnants of a faith. Return to father. Great day of reconciliation.

Forever incomprehensible to me, that for almost anyone who can write it is possible in pain to objectivize pain, so that I, for example, in my misfortune, perhaps even with misfortune's head still aflame, can sit down and write to someone: I am unhappy. Indeed, I can even go beyond that, and in various embellishments that talent permits—embellishments that seem to have nothing to do with misfortune—I can engage in fantasies about it simply or antithetically or with whole orchestras of associations. And this is not at all untruthful, it does not quiet the pain, it is merely, by a gift of grace, an excess of energies let loose in a moment in which pain has nonetheless visibly consumed all my energies to the very depths of my being, thus churned up. What sort of excess is it, then?

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* Translated and printed by arrangement with Schocken Books Inc., New York.

** F.B., the young woman from Berlin to whom Kafka was twice engaged. The second engagement was broken off in 1917.—Ed.

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1921

October 15. All my diaries given to M., about a week ago. A bit freer? No.

Am I still capable of keeping a sort of diary? In any event, it will be different, or rather it will shrink away, it will not exist at all; for instance, concerning Hardt, although he preoccupied me pretty much, I would be able only with the greatest effort to contrive a note. It is as though I had already long ago written everything about him, or—which is the same thing—as though I were no longer alive. Concerning M. I doubtless could write, but again not out of free resolve; it would be far too much directed against myself. I no longer need to be conscious of such things in detail, as I used to, I am not as forgetful in this respect as I once was, I am a memory become alive, hence, too, my sleeplessness.

October 16. Sunday. The misfortune of continuous beginning, the absence of illusion about the fact that everything is only a beginning and not even a beginning, the folly of others who do not know this and, for instance, play football in order finally for once to "get ahead," one's own folly buried within oneself as in a coffin, the folly of those others who think that is a real coffin, that is, a coffin that can be transported, opened, destroyed, exchanged.

Among the young women up in the park. No envy. Enough imagination to share their happiness, enough judgment to know that I am too weak for this happiness, enough folly to believe that I see through my condition and theirs. Not enough folly, there is a small gap in it, the wind whistling through it prevents full resonance.

If I had a strong wish to be a lightweight athlete, it probably would be as though I wished to go to heaven and to be allowed to be as deeply despairing there as I am here.

Miserable as my assets may be—"all else being equal" (especially considering my weakness of will)--even the most miserable on earth—I must nevertheless, even in my own sense, attempt to achieve the utmost with them, and it is empty sophistry to say that only one thing can be achieved with them, that one thing being therefore the best, that being despair.

October 17. Behind the fact that I have not learned anything useful and—there is a connection here—have let myself deteriorate physically also, there may be a design. I wanted to remain undiverted, undiverted by the joy of living the life of a useful and healthy man.

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As though sickness and despair could not be at least equally distracting.

I could round off this idea in various ways and thus develop it to a conclusion favorable to myself, but I do not dare, and I believe—at least today and so on most days—that there is no solution that can be favorable for me.

I do not envy the married couple as a particular pair, I envy all couples—and even when I envy only one couple, I actually envy all marital happiness in its infinitely varied forms; in the happiness of one marriage, I would probably, even in the most favorable case, despair.

I do not believe that there are people whose inner condition resembles mine, though I can imagine such people; but that the mysterious raven is always flying over their head as it flies over mine—that I cannot even imagine.

The systematic destruction of myself in the course of years is astounding, it was like a slowly developing breach in a dam, an action fully deliberate. The spirit that accomplished this must now be celebrating triumphs; why does he not let me in on them? But perhaps he has not yet fulfilled his purpose and therefore cannot think of anything else.

October 18. Eternal time of childhood. Again a summons of life.

It is quite conceivable that the glory of life is available to everyone and always in its entire fulness, but veiled, in depths, invisible, far off. But it is there not as a hostile force, not averse, not deaf. If it is summoned by the right word, the right name, it comes. That is the essence of magic, which does not create, but summons.

October 19. The nature of the desert trail. A man, who as the leader of his own being, takes this path, with a vestige (more is inconceivable) of awareness of what is occurring. All his life he is on the trail of Canaan; that he is to see it only just before his death is unbelievable. This last view can have meaning only as symbolizing what an imperfect instant human life is, imperfect because this kind of life could last endlessly and yet result in nothing but an instant. Moses failed to reach Canaan not because his life was too short, but because it was a human life. This ending of Deuteronomy has a likeness to the final scene of *The Sentimental Education.*

He who does not master life while alive must use one hand somehow to ward off his despair over his fate—that is done very imper-

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fectly—but with his other hand he may record what he sees beneath the wreckage, because he sees different things than the others see and more things, for he is dead in his lifetime. This presupposes that he does not need both hands, or more hands than he has, for his struggle with despair.

October 20. A dream, brief, in a convulsive, brief sleep, I clung to it convulsively, in immense happiness. A ramified dream containing a thousand relationships that became clear simultaneously, in a single stroke; what remains of it is barely the recollection of the basic feeling: My brother committed a crime—murder, I think; I and some others had part in this crime; retribution, resolution, release approaches from afar, it looms larger and larger, its ceaseless approach is heralded by many signs, which I hail with mad exclamations, the madness increasing as the presence comes closer. My single exclamations were short sentences: I thought that because of their obvious relevance I would never be able to forget them, and now I no longer know any one of them exactly. They could have been only exclamations, because it cost me a great effort to speak, I had to blow up my cheeks and twist my mouth, as though I had a toothache, before I could bring out a word. The happiness consisted in retribution coming and my welcoming it, free, convinced and happy—a sight that must have moved the gods, and this emotion of the gods moved me in turn almost to the point of tears.

October 21. It was impossible for him to enter the house because he had heard a voice saying: "Wait until I lead you." And so he was still lying in the dust before the house, although his case was past hope (as Sarah would say).

Everything is fantasy, family, office, friends, street, everything is fantasy, either remote or close, woman; but the most immediate truth is only this, that you are pushing your head against the wall of a windowless and doorless cell.

October 22. An expert, a specialist, one who knows his role, a knowledge, to be sure, that cannot be communicated, but that fortunately everyone can do without.

October 23. A film of Palestine in the afternoon.

October 25. My parents were playing cards; I sat there alone, entirely the stranger; father said that I should play too or at least watch the game; I excused myself in some way. What was the meaning of this refusal repeated many times since childhood? Community life,

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in a sense public life was made accessible to me by the invitation; the performance asked of me as a participant I would have carried out, not well, but tolerably; playing would probably not even have bored me too much—nevertheless I refused. This being so, I am in the wrong when complaining that the stream of life has never gripped me, that I never got free of Prague, have never gone in for any sport or trade, etc. —I would probably have rejected the offer, just as I rejected the invitation to play cards. Only the absurd gained admission, the study of law, the office, then later absurd marginal occupations, such as a little gardening, carpentering, etc. These occupations must be regarded as the behavior of a man who throws out a needy beggar and then plays the benefactor by himself, by passing alms from his right hand to his left.

But I always refused, doubtless because of my general weakness, and especially my weakness of will; I came to understand this fairly late. Formerly I usually interpreted this refusal as a good sign (misled by the great hopes I had for myself), today only a trace of this kindly interpretation remains.

October 29. On one of the following evenings I really did participate, by noting down the scores of the game for mother. But this did not bring about any greater intimacy, and even if there was a trace of it, it was buried in weariness, boredom, regret over time lost. I would always have been like that. Only very rarely have I put behind me this borderland between solitude and community. I am even more deeply in it than in solitude itself. What a live beautiful land, in comparison, was Robinson Crusoe's island.

October 30. Feeling of complete helplessness.

What unites you with these rigidly delimited, speaking, eye-flashing bodies more closely than with any object, for instance the penholder in your hand? The fact that you are of their kind? But you are not of their kind, that is why you have raised the issue.

The rigid delimitation of human bodies is terrifying.

The marvel, the insoluble riddle of not perishing, of silent guidance. This pushes one to the absurdity: "I for my part would have been lost." I for my part.

November 1. Werfel's *Bocksgesang.*

To freely dispose of a world while disregarding its laws. The imposition of law. The joy of being faithful to this law.

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But it is not possible simply to impose on the world a law that everything should remain as of old, but that the new law giver should be free. This would be not law, but arbitrariness, rebellion, self-condemnation.

November 2. Vague hope, vague confidence.

An endless dreary Sunday afternoon—devouring whole years, an afternoon consisting of years. Alternately despairing in the empty streets and finding calm on the couch. Sometimes astonishment at the almost incessantly passing, colorless, senseless clouds. "You are reserved for a great Monday!" "Well said, but this Sunday will never end."

December 6. Two children, alone in the apartment, climbed into a big chest, the lid fell shut, and unable to open it they were suffocated.

December 12. Much suffering in thought.

I was startled from deep sleep. In the middle of the room, at a little table by candlelight, sat a strange man. In the semi-darkness he sat broad and heavy, his unbuttoned winter coat made him seem even more so.

To think through in a more effective way:

Raabe on his deathbed, when his wife stroked his forehead: "This is lovely."

The grandfather who laughs, with toothless mouth, at his grandchild.

1922

January 16. This last week it was like a collapse, as complete as perhaps only that of one night two years ago; I have not experienced any other instance like it. Everything seemed at an end, and today it seems not at all different. It can be conceived in two ways, perhaps simultaneously. First, collapse, impossibility of sleeping, impossibility of being awake, impossibility of enduring life, more accurately the continuity of life. The clocks do not correspond, the inner one hurries on in a devilish or demonic or at any rate inhuman way, the outer sluggishly keeps its usual pace. What else will come of it but that the two separate worlds should split, and they do split, or at least tug at each other in a frightful fashion. The frenzy of the inner movement may have various causes, the most obvious being introspection that permits no idea to come to rest, flushes up each one only to be itself pursued as matter

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for fresh introspection. Second, this chase takes a direction away from mankind. The solitude that has for the most part always been forced upon me and in part sought by me—though this too was nothing but compulsion—now becomes quite unequivocal and goes to the very extreme. Where does it lead? It can—this seems the most pressing conclusion—lead to insanity, nothing more can be said about this; the chase goes right through me, tearing me to pieces. Or else I can—can I?—were it only to the slightest extent, keep my balance, and thus let myself be borne along by the chase. Where does that take me, then? "Chase" is after all only an image, I might also say "onslaught against the last earthly limit," namely onslaught from below, from man, and I might, since this too is only an image, replace it with the image of onslaught from above, downward toward me.

This entire literature is an onslaught against a terminus, and if Zionism had not interposed itself, it might easily have developed into a new secret doctrine, a kabbala. There are tendencies toward this. It is true that an almost inconceivable genius is required here, which will drive its roots anew into the old centuries or re-create them, but which with all that is not squandered but only now begins to spend itself.

January 19. The infinite, deep, warm, liberating joy of sitting near the crib of one's child, facing its mother.

There is also in it something of the feeling: things no longer depend on you, unless you want it so. In contrast, the feeling of the childless: Everything depends on you, always, whether you want it or not, every moment until the end, every nerve-racking moment depends now on you, and without result. Sisyphus was a bachelor.

Nothing evil: if you have crossed the threshold everything is as it should be. Another world, and you must not speak.

M. is right regarding me: "Everything is glorious, only not for me, and rightly so." Rightly so, I say, showing that I have at least this confidence. But do I really have it? For I do not actually think of "right"; life, out of sheer convincing force, has no room in it for right and wrong. As in the desperate hour of death, so in desperate living, there is no meditating about right and wrong. It suffices that the arrows fit exactly into the wounds inflicted.

But of a general censure of the generation there is no trace in me.

January 21. So far as I know the task has never been so difficult. One might say: it is not a task, not even an impossible one, it is not even impossibility itself, it is nothing, not even so much a child as the

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hope of a barren woman. Yet it is the air in which I breathe, as long as I am to breathe.

Without ancestors, without marriage, without progeny, with an unbridled desire for ancestors, marriage, and progeny. All stretch out their hands toward me: ancestors, marriage, and progeny, but from a point far too remote from me.

There is an artificial, wretched substitute for all things: for ancestors, marriage, and progeny. One creates it amidst convulsions, and, if not, one perishes of the convulsions. One perishes on account of the hopelessness of the substitute.

The development was simple. When I was still satisfied, I wanted to be dissatisfied, plunging, with all the means of the age and of the tradition available to me, into dissatisfaction; and then I wanted to be able to return. Thus I was always dissatisfied, even with my satisfaction. It is odd how with sufficient systematization the comedy of play-acting can become reality. My spiritual decline began with childish, although childish-conscious, acting. For instance, I produced artificial twitches of my facial muscles, I stepped over the ditch with my arms crossed behind my head. Childishly odious but successful game. (It was the same with learning to write, except that this development was later unfortunately blocked). If it is possible in this way to compel misfortune to occur, it should be possible to coerce anything into occuring. However much the development seems to refute me, and however it contradicts my nature to think so, I absolutely cannot admit that the beginnings of my misfortune had an inner necessity, they may have had a necessity, but not an inner one, they came on the wing like flies, and could have been driven away as easily as flies.

To say that you forsook me would be very unfair, but that I was forsaken, and sometimes terribly so, is true.

January 27. Spindelmühle. Need to free myself from the misfortune of the double sleigh—in which clumsiness had a part—the broken trunk, the wobbling table, the bad light, the impossibility of finding quiet in the hotel during the afternoon, etc. This cannot be attained by neglecting it, for it cannot be neglected, it can be attained only by throwing in new forces. Of course, there may be surprises here; the most disconsolate man must grant that according to experience something can come out of nothing, that out of the dilapidated pigsty there may issue a coachman and horses.

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Although I have given my name distinctly in writing to the hotel, although they have twice written to me correctly, down on the board it says Josef K. Should I set them right, or should I ask them to enlighten me?

January 30. When someone says: "What do I care about life? It is only because of my family that I do not want to die." But the family is precisely the representative of life, therefore he wants to remain alive for the sake of life. Now so far as my mother is concerned this holds for me too, but only of late. But it is perhaps gratitude and emotion that bring me to this? Gratitude and emotion, because I see how she tries, with inexhaustible energy considering her age, to make up for my lack of relation to life. But gratitude is life too.

February 1. Nothing, only fatigue. The happiness of the wagoner, who experiences every evening as I experienced mine of this day, and even much more pleasantly. An evening on the stove, for instance. Man purer than in the morning, the time before the weary falling asleep is the actual time of freedom from specters, all are driven away, only as night advances, do they return, they are back even though unrecognizable, and then the healthy man daily begins to drive them off anew.

Seen primitively, it is solely physical pain which is the actual, incontrovertible truth, unaffected by anything external (martyrdom, sacrifice for a human being). Strange, that it was not the god of pain who was the principal god of the earliest religions (but perhaps only of the later ones). To each patient his household god, to the consumptive the god of suffocation. How can one bear his approach if one does not partake of him even before the terrible union?

February 2. Happiness, to be together with people.

February 3. Sleepless, almost entirely; plagued by dreams, as though etched into me, a resistant material.

One weakness, one defect is clear, though difficult to describe; it is a mixture of apprehensiveness, withholding, loquacity, lukewarmness; I want to describe something definite, a group of weaknesses that represent in a particular aspect one single, precisely characterized weakness (distinct from the great vices such as mendacity, vanity, etc.). This weakness keeps me both from insanity and from every ascent. Because it keeps me from insanity, I cultivate it; from fear of insanity, I sacrifice the ascent, and shall certainly lose the bargain on this level, which knows no bargain; unless sleepiness intervenes and by its daily-nightly work

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breaks down every obstacle, and clears the way. But then again only insanity will receive me, because I did not want the ascent, which is achieved only if wanted.

February 4. In the desperate cold, the changed face, the incomprehensible others.

What M. said without being entirely able to understand the truth of it (there is also a justifiable sad pride), about the happiness of chatting with people. How can anybody but I enjoy chatting! Probably too late; by a peculiar detour return to people.

February 5. Escaped from them. By one or another adroit jump. At home, by the lamp, in the quiet room. Imprudent to say it. It calls them from the forests, as though I had lighted the lamp to help them pick up the trail.

February 6. Comforted upon hearing about a man who worked in Paris, Brussels, London, and on a Brazilian steamship that sailed up the Amazon River to the borders of Peru, and who in the war bore with relative ease the terrible suffering of the campaign in Transylvania, because he had been used to hardships since childhood. The comfort lies not only in the demonstration of such possibilities, but in the pleasure over the fact that with such achievements on the first plane much must have been won also on the second plane, much wrested from clenched fists. It is therefore possible.

February 12. The rejection that I always encountered was not in terms of "I do not love you," but of: "You cannot love me, however much you want to, you unhappily love your love for me, your love for me does not love you." Hence it is incorrect to say that I have experienced the words: "I love you," I have experienced only the expectant silence that should have been broken by my "I love you," I have experienced only this, nothing else.

My fear when tobogganing, my apprehensiveness when walking on smooth snow, a little story that I read today, bring up again the long-ignored, always close-lying thought, whether it was after all only insane self-interest, fear for myself, and not the fear for a higher self, but fear for my ordinary well-being, that was the cause of my decline—and actually in such a way that I supplied the avenger from my own being (a special case of the right hand not knowing what the left does). In my chancellory the reckoning is as though my life were to begin only tomorrow, whereas I am at the end.

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February 13. The possibility of serving with the whole heart.

February 18. A stage director who must create everything from the ground up, he must even beget the actors. A visitor is not admitted, the director is busy with important theatrical business. What is this business? Changing the diapers of a future actor.

February 26. I admit—to whom do I admit it? to the letter?—that there are possibilities in me, immediate possibilities, which I do not yet know; but the thing is to find the path to them, and after finding it, to dare! This means a great deal: there are possibilities, it means even that a scoundrel can become an honorable man, a man happily in possession of honor.

Your recent half-awake fantasies.

March 9. To use the aggressor's horse to ride on. The only possibility. But what forces and skills does this require? And how late is it now?

March 9. Pure feeling, and clarity about its causes. The sight of children, particularly of a girl (upright carriage, short black hair), and of another (blonde, indefinite features, indefinite smile), rousing music, marching step. The feeling of one who is in trouble, and help comes, but who does not rejoice over being saved—indeed, he is not saved—but over the coming of new, young people, confident, ready to take up the struggle; ignorant, it is true, as to what impends, but it is an ignorance that does not make the spectator hopeless, but evokes admiration, joy, tears. Also mixed with it is hatred of him against whom the struggle is waged (but little Jewish feeling, I think).

April 10. As a boy I was (and would have long remained, if I had not forcibly been brought to sexual things) as innocent and uninterested in regard to sexual matters as I am today, for instance, in regard to the theory of relativity. Only trivialities (but these too after specific instruction) came to my notice, for instance that the very women who on the street seemed the most beautiful and best dressed were supposed to be bad.

Eternal youth is impossible; even if there were no other obstacle, introspection precludes it.

We dig the mine of Babel.

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A blade of straw? Many a man keeps his head above water by clinging to a pencil mark. Does he? Drowned, he dreams of being saved.

Death had to lift him out of life, as a cripple is lifted out of a wheel chair. He sat as solidly and heavily in his life as the cripple in the wheel chair.

1923

June 12. Always apprehensive when writing. It is understandable Every word turned in the hands of the specters—this swing of the hand is their characteristic movement—becomes a spear turned against the speaker. Especially a remark like this. And so on ad infinitum. The only consolation is that it happens whether you wish it to happen or not. And what you want helps only in an imperceptibly small way. More than a consolation is this, that you too have weapons.

(*Translated by Norbert Guterman*)

(*The excerpts from Kafka's diaries translated here for the first time are contained in Volume VI of Kafka's* Gesammelte Schriften, *published in six volumes in Berlin,* 1935-1937, *by the former Schocken Verlag, the original copyright owner.*

This fall Schocken Books Inc. of New York will publish, in its first American list, an English translation of a volume of Kafka stories, The Great Wall of China. *This will be followed by an English edition of the biography written by Max Brod, Franz Kafka's lifelong friend.*

Kafka's posthumous papers were saved by Max Brod when he left Prague in 1939 *and are preserved in the archives of the Schocken Library in Jerusalem. Schocken Books Inc. plans to publish these papers, under Dr. Brod's editorship, both in the original German and in an English translation (two volumes of diaries, two volumes of letters, and one volume of fragments).*

Also scheduled for fall publication are a reprint of Volumes I-V of the original Gesammelte Schriften *and a reprint of the German edition of the Brod biography.*)

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Books

VERSIONS OF BOLSHEVISM

TROTSKY'S BIOGRAPHY of Stalin,* suppressed by the publishers since 1941, was no sooner released for general circulation than most reviewers set to work to snipe at the book and jeer at its author. This is particularly true of some of the "liberal" reviewers writing for newspapers which regularly and as a matter of course hand over books critical of the Soviet myth precisely to people like Frederick L. Schuman, one of the busiest and sleekest mythomaniacs. Schuman reviewed the book for *PM*. And why not? For that newspaper the choice of Schuman as a reviewer of Trotsky is entirely logical. *PM* is controlled by irresponsible journalists greatly on the make who will stick with Stalinism so long as it continues to gather power and prestige—and just so long, too, as the coming showdown with American capitalism is delayed. When the showdown comes they will inevitably run back to Mamma.

Now the one thing that cannot be claimed for men like Schuman is that they are objective. After all, in their writings on the Soviet Union those people are guilty of the most flagrant suppression of evidence. One would think, then, that knowing their own commitments, they would at least refrain from attacking Trotsky on the ground that he hated Stalin and could not be objective about him. But no, that is the charge—the principal charge—brought against the book. (Trotsky himself disclaims any personal feelings toward Stalin, warning his critics not to indulge in that cheap use of psychoanalysis against which Freud protested before his death.) If by objectivity we mean intellectual honesty, rather than freedom from prior ideological commitments, then there can be no doubt of Trotsky's honesty and every doubt in the world of the honesty of some of his critics, who are really no better than tricksters, for they pose as liberals while playing the Stalinist game.

The device of gratuitously "motivating" the authors of books one dislikes is of course reserved solely for the opponents of Soviet

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* STALIN. *By Leon Trotsky. Edited and translated from the Russian by Charles Malamuth. Harper & Brothers.* $5.00.

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totalitarianism. Joseph E. Davies, a puerile and ignorant bourgeois, was treated with all the respect due to a scholar and a gentleman when *Mission to Moscow* came out. But if psychology is to be employed as a political weapon, then it should be easy to demonstrate that since Mr. Davies stands in a wholly extraneous relation to his subject-matter—since actually he knows next to nothing about the history of the Russian Revolution and of Communism—it must have been other considerations, not integral to the subject of his book, which prompted him to adopt certain views; and even a neophyte in the science of psychology can tell that in Mr. Davies' character inordinate self-esteem and sheer conceit play a preponderant part. Nor are the motives of political hacks like Ella Winter, Anna Louise Strong, and Maurice Hindus ever questioned in the liberal press. But when Trotsky—a political thinker of genius, one of the greatest revolutionists of all times and the man under whose direct leadership the October insurrection was carried through—writes about Stalin and his regime he is treated like a cheapskate politician obsessed with hatred of his rival in a fight for power.

The tremendous struggle inside the Bolshevik Party to determine the course of the Revolution is thus reduced to a question of personal animus. That and nothing more. Trotsky is in effect denied the *right* to deal with the subject—and what is this subject if not the Russian Revolution and its fate?—which alone identifies him for us and without which his life has no meaning. He is not objective, we are told. However, it takes but the slightest insight into historical processes to discover that objectivity, in the usual sense of that term, is unattainable in a serious political struggle; in politics knowledge is the product of participation and involvement, and the spectator, though he may retain his objectivity, is precisely the one whose ideas are the least pertinent to the matter at hand; Trotsky, moreover, did not write a literary biography nor an historical treatise a hundred years after the event but a polemical work summing up and extending the analysis of Stalin and Stalinism that he was engaged in for more than fifteen years. Clearly, the real issue is whether Trotsky's analysis of Stalin is true or false. Only people trying to evade this very plain and obvious test would undertake to capitalize on such terms as "objective" and "subjective."

And when it comes to that Mr. Schuman and his friends should be reminded that murder is the most subjective of all human acts. At the exhibition-trials in Moscow Trotsky was accused of plotting to kill Stalin. Yet the only evidence the prosecution could muster was

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not anything objective—such as, for instance, the corpse of Stalin—but solely the staged confessions of defendants pulverized into submission by methods that are no longer a mystery. Now Stalin is boss of the Kremlin while Trotsky lies dead in Mexico, his skull crushed by a pickaxe swung by an agent of the NKVD. "Since early youth," wrote Iremashvilli, a boyhood friend of Stalin's, "the carrying out of vengeful plots became for him the goal that dominated all his efforts." One could maintain, and quite plausibly too, that it is not so much political necessity as the psychology of Stalin which explains the assassination of Trotsky. Against that Mr. Schuman could argue that such an explanation is subjective. He would be right, of course, but there it is nevertheless. Really, it is time the mythomaniacs learned that psychology is a knife that cuts both ways.

Stalin's murderous intervention in the writing of his biography accounts for the unfinished state of this book. Only the first seven chapters, which do not take us beyond 1923, are printed as Trotsky wrote them; the rest consists of notes filled in by Mr. Malamuth, the editor and translator. The estimate of Stalin remains substantially the same as that recorded in Trotsky's earlier writings. Stalin personifies the interests and aspirations of the bureaucratic caste now cashing in on the Revolution. He is the despoiler, not the continuator of Leninism. A mediocrity so far as theoretical imagination and historical intuition are concerned, he remained in the background in 1905 and also in 1917 because in those heroic periods the posts of leadership were necessarily occupied by men capable of inspiring mass-action and of acting as tribunes, orators, strategists and analysts of revolution. Stalin's talents, on the other hand, are strictly of the sort which find ample scope only in periods of reaction, when the masses are in retreat and the political machine seizes control. Whenever it becomes necessary to choose between the idea and the machine, he inevitably sides with the machine. A program must first of all create its bureaucracy before he can believe in it. "Such attributes of character as slyness, faithlessness, the ability to exploit the lowest instincts of human nature are developed to an extraordinary degree in Stalin, and considering his strong character, represent mighty weapons in a struggle." But not of course in any struggle, for the struggle to liberate humanity requires other traits. "In Stalin's spiritual life, the personal practical aim always stood above the theoretical truth, and the will played an immeasurably greater part than the intellect. . . . Lack of confidence in the masses, as well as in individuals, is the basis

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of his nature. His empiricism always compels him to choose the path of least resistance. That is why, as a rule, at all the great turning points of history this near-sighted revolutionist assumes an opportunist position. . . . At the same time he is invariably inclined to favor the most resolute actions in solving the problems he has mastered. Under all conditions well-organized violence seems to him the shortest distance between two points. . . . He is a kind of opportunist with a bomb." Trotsky reports that as early as 1924 he predicted that in the absence of new and significant mass-movements in Russia, or in western Europe and in Asia, Stalin would "automatically" become dictator.

One wonders whether Trotsky would have revised his estimate of Stalin had he lived to observe his performance during the war. Such a revision was lately attempted by James Burnham (cf. "Lenin's Heir," PARTISAN REVIEW, Winter 1945), who argued that though Trotsky's sketch of Stalin seemed credible until the war, the evidence of the war years compels the recognition that he is "a great man in the grand style." It is true, of course, that his policies have in recent years been marked not by the cautious and chiefly defensive manipulations typical of him in the past but by an heretofore unsuspected "boldness and dash"; hence it can be said that his use of the opportunities that came to him during the war appears not to jibe with Trotsky's appraisal of his talents. One might speculate, for instance, that his success in eliminating his party-opponents and the consequent experience of total power has added more than a cubit to his political stature. Still, that by no means invalidates Trotsky's characterization of him as a "mediocrity." It is necessary to keep in mind the exact terms of Trotsky's analysis. He was comparing Stalin not to Genghis Khan, Ivan the Terrible, or even Hitler and Himmler, but to such major revolutionary figures as Lenin and . . . Trotsky. Now there can be no doubt that as a Marxist theoretician and as a leader of the working classes against oppression and exploitation—and that, after all, is what Stalin pretends to be—he is worse than a mediocrity; as the boss of a system of state serfdom, however, he is nothing less than a genius—the Grand Inquisitor raised to supreme power by that organization of organizations, the totalitarian state. And the reason that Trotsky's appraisal of Stalin seems so questionable at present is that we can no longer accept the premise which permitted the comparison of Stalin, even if negatively, with the aforementioned revolutionary figures. For thus to compare them is willy-nilly to identify their aims with his, whereas the fact is that Stalin's aims have long

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ago ceased to have anything in common with the classic goals of socialism.

Stalin's ruthlessness, his indifference to human suffering, and the unprecedented scale of his autocratic sway certainly link him, as Burnham remarks, to "the tradition of the most spectacular of the Tsars, of the great Kings of the Medes and Persians," etc. But to conclude on that account that he is a great man is to judge him along purely aesthetic lines, that is, in the sense of the distinction drawn between the aesthetic approach and the ethical one. The aesthetic attitude is essentially that of the uncommitted person, of the detached onlooker gratified by spectacles. It is an attitude exhausted by the categories of the "interesting" on the one hand and the "boring" on the other—categories as modern as they are inauthentic. In 1905, in the midst of the tempestuous movement of the masses against Tsarism, the symbolist Bruysov, a poet unpolitical to the core, expressed the same viewpoint in the following lines: "Beautiful in the splendor of his power is the Oriental King Assarhaddon, and beautiful the ocean of a people's wrath beating to pieces a tottering throne. But hateful—are half-measures." Thus Bruysov found Tsarism in its pristine power and the power of the masses in revolt equally entrancing. It is only in that sense that one may speak of Stalin as great, precisely in the sense that this epithet may be applied to Hitler. But in politics, as in morals, the criteria of aestheticism are the least meaningful. In the historical struggle to which we are committed Stalinism deploys enormous forces, and the one thing we cannot afford to do is to abandon our interests and values in order to convert, through an aesthetic sleight of hand, the tragic struggle into a show of 'pure politics,' a show in which Stalin inevitably appears as the star-performer. Pure politics, like pure art, is a delusion. The committed man, that is the man who has accepted the hazards of his political existence, can no more attend such a show than he can attend his own funeral.

But if Trotsky is on the whole convincing in his analysis of the human and political content of Stalin's personality and of the methods devised by him to make himself dictator, he is not in the least convincing in his general analysis of Stalinism. This book shows that he held on until the end to his theory of the Stalinist bureaucracy as representing "the first stage of bourgeois restoration." Events, however, in particular events since 1941, have demolished this theory. For according to its logic the process of restoration should have been

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speeded up by the war, which Russia fought in close alliance with powerful bourgeois states. Yet nothing of the sort happened. Actually the war has led to the expansion of the area of state serfdom (or bureaucratic collectivism, if you prefer a more neutral term) at the expense of the area of capitalist economy. It is this erroneous interpretation of Stalinism as historically belonging not to itself but to some other class which accounts for Trotsky's faulty reading of Soviet strategy during the People's Front period. In that period Trotsky and his followers pictured Stalin as abjectly capitulating to the bourgeois-democratic states in order to obtain the then much-desired alliance against Nazi Germany. It turned out, however, that once the alliance was effected (after an interval of backing the Nazis in the war), instead of Stalin it was his allies who grovelled, renouncing some of their essential interests for the sake of a partnership of which the USSR was the chief beneficiary. Contrary to Trotsky's prediction, Stalin has pursued not only an independent but even a brutally aggressive course in relation to his allies. It is plain that only in appearance did the People's Front strategy indicate the relinquishment of independent positions in favor of democratic capitalism. In reality it was a strategy of deception calculated to extract from capitalism what it could give by way of political and material aid while withholding all return-payments except verbal promises and such purely formal concessions as the dissolution of the Comintern. The war was conducted by the Soviet bureaucracy neither in a proletarian nor in a bourgeois fashion. The methods it employed are peculiar to itself, accurately reflecting its interests as a new ruling class, the master of a new social order as hostile to capitalism as it is to socialism. In point of fact, on the basis of Trotsky's general theory of the Soviet bureaucracy it becomes impossible to explain either its conduct of the war or the subsequent successes of its foreign policy.

Not a few left-wing critics have observed that this theory of Trotsky's is logically implicit in his either-or perspective restricting present-day society to the alternative of capitalism or socialism.* He saw no other possibilities. Lenin was equally committed to this view; Trotsky quotes him as stating repeatedly that without a revolution in the West the revival of capitalism was unavoidable in Russia. It is this schema which to a certain extent renders intelligible the apparent incapacity of both Lenin and Trotsky to comprehend the

* Hence Trotsky evaluated the Stalinist state as a combination of both systems. In its socialist aspect he characterized it as "a degenerated workers' state"; in its capitalist aspect as "the first stage of bourgeois restoration."

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danger to socialism inherent in the strict party-dictatorship that they established on the foundations of the October Revolution—a revolution made, as far too many people have forgotten, to give all power to freely elected Soviets, not all power to the Bolshevik Party. Every strengthening of the party-dictatorship, no matter by what means, seemed both to Lenin and Trotsky to be a further guarantee of the socialist integrity of the Soviet government. Trotsky relates that in 1922, at the eleventh Party Congress, Lenin nominated Stalin to the post of General Secretary because of his idea that as an expert in strong-arm tactics Stalin would succeed in dispersing the dissident Bolshevik groupings. Only when it was too late did Lenin realize what his willingness to profit by Stalin's peculiar talents had brought him to, and before his death he broke all comradely and political relations with him.

It must be said, furthermore, that Trotsky appears to have drawn few far-reaching conclusions from the ruinous development of the Revolution. This is shown by the off-hand way in which he dismisses the criticism of the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion; also by his inadequate answer to the criticism that the Bolshevik leaders made but few and feeble efforts to include in their government socialist and revolutionary parties other than their own. And the failure of the Left Opposition to defeat Stalinism he explains away with the all-too-broad historical generalization that "a struggle for power by the Left Opposition . . . was conceivable only under the conditions of revolutionary upsurge. . . . But during the early twenties and later there was no revolutionary upsurge in Russia, quite the contrary. Under such circumstances it was out of the question to launch a struggle for power." To my mind, this reasoning does not go nearly far enough; it is much too general and abstract. The fact is that even if objective conditions had been more favorable Trotsky could not have hoped to succeed in his fight against the bureaucracy, controlled by Stalin, so long as he shared its major political assumptions. He was organically tied to it by so many beliefs that it was impossible for him to break through its discipline in order to appeal to the masses against its abuse of power. After all, he too was above all concerned with maintaining the unity of the Party against all opponents, right or left, and with maintaining the dictatorship at all costs.

Trotsky's dialectical skill served him well in exposing the fallacies in the theory of socialism in one country. It can be argued, however, that the theory of *one party in one country,* to which Trotsky is quite

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as much committed as Lenin or Stalin, is equally fallacious. In this theory it is assumed that a party, in the true sense of that term, *can maintain itself as such in the absence of other parties.* But do we not take for granted, in the very concept of a party, the existence of other parties? What is a party? It is a voluntary political association, and only in so far as it preserves its voluntary character can it be said to practice internal democracy and to express the will of its membership. But when a party monopolizes the state-power and political life, depriving all other parties of legal existence, it rapidly loses the essential attributes of a party and is transformed into another type of organization altogether. Historical experience has demonstrated that the one and only party is bound to degenerate, regardless of its programmatic intentions, into a power-machine used by its bosses to perpetuate their domination. One cannot count on exceptional circumstances to prevent this development. In other words, the ruling party can have no hope of insuring internal democracy if it proscribes all other parties, thus destroying freedom of political opposition. Democracy in one party turns out to be as impracticable as socialism in one country.

Since the theory of one-party dictatorship provides no institutional safeguards against abuses of power, one must suppose that its proponents relied on the personal integrity of the party leaders, which they took for granted once and for all, as a sufficient guarantee against degeneration, betrayal, and all those reversals and transformations that history knows only too well. Such reliance constitutes psychological as well as political primitivism. Of course, in practice the one-party dictatorship was built up by the Bolsheviks empirically, in piecemeal fashion, more in accordance with that inescapable "discipline of vicissitudes" of which Polybius speaks in his *History* than through theoretical rigor and foresight. It was only after the event that the dogma was erected and at once consecrated as an inseparable part of revolutionary Marxism. (In Marx, however, the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat is in no sense identical with the idea of the dictatorship of a party; it hardly means anything more than the rule of the majority applying forcible means to overcome the opposition of the bourgeois minority.) And Trotsky is vulnerable precisely in that he failed to dismember the Bolshevik theory of dictatorship so as to reveal its totalitarian essence. Instead he vied with Stalin in an attempt to prove his Leninist orthodoxy.

The truth is that Trotsky had so thoroughly identified himself with the Bolshevik tradition as to become incapable of a consistently

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radical criticism of it in the light of historical experience. One can put it that in joining the Bolsheviks in 1917 he struck a bargain, as it were, with Lenin. The bargain came to this, that Lenin accepted his theory of permanent revolution while in exchange Trotsky accepted Lenin's ideas of a rigidly centralized organization and of a revolutionary elite. It is astonishing that, with all their vaunted mastery of the doctrine of historical materialism, Lenin and Trotsky should have so readily equated the interests of the revolutionary elite (the party) with the interests of the class (the proletariat). If consciousness, as the historical materialist believes, is the product of social existence, then he above all should be able to perceive that given the very real difference between the social existence of the party and that of the class, especially in the period when, after winning power, the party disposes of the resources of the state and of the economy, a corresponding difference in consciousness is bound to result—a difference not merely in degree but in kind, a fundamental difference of needs and interests. With the spread of the Stalinist infection, Trotsky began to note this difference and even to insist on it, but he seems to have drawn no theoretical conclusions from it so far as the basic principles of Bolshevism are concerned. Moreover, after his expulsion from Russia he introduced the very same ideas of dictatorship into the program of his movement abroad, known in later years as the Fourth International. Such ideas amount to nothing less than the demand that the masses again entrust the revolutionary party (namely the Trotskyites) with power because . . . well, because it is *the* revolutionary party and we should take its word for it. But in politics, as Lenin once remarked, only idiots put their faith in words—a remark which Trotsky rounded out brilliantly when he added that "the post-Leninist period must teach even idiots to rid themselves of this gullibility." Trotsky's orthodox followers, who go on repeating mechanically the phrases of 1918 no matter what happens, would no doubt reply that the masses can always test the party's words by its acts. But can they? The trouble is that once a party has been entrusted with dictatorial power the masses have in effect been deprived of the means to strike back at it if it betrays their trust. Unfortunately, except for the bitter medicine of defeat in war, no method has yet been devised whereby an experiment in modern dictatorship can be undone. And as for the Leninist idea of "the relationship between party and class,"* there is obviously a not inconsiderable element

* Why *party* rather than *parties?* I suspect the singular, as I suspect all monistic constructions.

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of romantic and idealistic gratuitousness in it which must be eliminated before it can be brought into line with historical materialism.

To be sure, it is more hindsight than insight that now enables us to gauge the fallacies in Bolshevik thinking. Under the stress of action even the wisest and most devoted leaders are apt to take short cuts and to follow the line of least resistance. Also, however profound their consciousness, it is inexorably limited by the historical situation which produced it. We would do well to recall Marx's observation in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* that "just as little as we form an opinion of an individual in accordance with what he thinks of himself, just so little can we appraise a revolutionary epoch in accordance with its own consciousness of itself."

I hope that the reader will not mistake my critical approach to Leninism for that total negation of it which has of late become so common among independent radicals. The political description of such radicals cannot stop with the word "independent"; one must also admit that they are disoriented; and in their search for a new integration they will discover that an historical experience of the magnitude of Leninism can neither be ignored nor rejected out of hand in a mood of moral resentment and despair. I, for one, do not sympathize with those ultra-left moralists whose program is not to assimilate Leninism but simply to disgorge it. To return to the Utopian origins of socialism will get us nowhere, or rather it will merely throw us back to the pre-political stage of socialism. What distinguished the socialist movement in that early stage was its creative *Schwärmerei* or enthusiasm, in the old-fashioned sense of that term. Now it is much too late for that. The politics that we oppose can be counteracted only by the revitalized politics of democratic and libertarian socialism; and the first lesson that we can learn from the Leninists is precisely that there is no substitute for the instrumentalities of politics. As a system of ideas Leninism has of course been deeply compromised by the course that the Revolution has taken under Stalin; but it is impermissible to forget that a line of blood separates the Leninist generation from Stalin and his accomplices. What is of value in Leninism is its luminous and powerful will to socialist action, and also the immediacy and daring of its theoretical inquiries into social reality. What is to be repudiated is its denigration, at once so naive and arrogant, of democratic processes, its reduction of moral discipline to party discipline, and its generally authoritarian interpretation of Marxist thought, an interpretation that breeds destructive attitudes

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toward culture and toward the individual. Some years ago we still spoke of revising the Leninist system of ideas; perhaps such notions are already out of order. Still, there can be no re-integration of the socialist consciousness if it merely recoils from the evils of Bolshevism without thoroughly analysing and evaluating the epos of its encounter with history.

PHILIP RAHV

LE MISANTHROPE

MEMOIRS OF HECATE COUNTY. *By Edmund Wilson. Doubleday.* $2.50.

IN ITS mordant analysis of our middle-class culture, in its pessimism and in the symbolic attempt of its hero to find his true class, this book resembles *The Education of Henry Adams.* But its real counterpart in American writing is a dark and distorted parable by Melville called *The Confidence Man.* I have never thought the latter a good novel, though I respect the force with which Melville described the moral bareness and deceptions of his time; and though Mr. Wilson's book is better, it is not very good either. Unfortunately, perishable books get praised, poor books are genially tolerated; we are always kind to books that do not simply annoy us. *Memoirs of Hecate County* has enough in it to make the fortunes of a dozen writers; but it is not a good book. The judgment is proportionate to Edmund Wilson's gifts, which are extraordinary and sometimes unpleasant, and to his peers, who are very few in this country.

Mr. Wilson's books have always come to us dangling an historical key with which to open them; with it we can open them—just that. His mind takes wings from references, historical associations, the personal details behind a career. The elaborate symbolism of this book, for which we are prepared by the myth of Hecate, the epigraph from a horror story by Gogol that prefaces it, and the excessive tension with which the settings are given, is another example of Mr. Wilson's mind working in the historical underbrush. The architectural and domestic references in it—houses, gardens, manners, costume, furniture—even weigh his pages down. Yet it is a sign of the deeper claims of his imagination that these "keys"—the Finland Station, Axel's Castle, Hecate, the artists who are triple thinkers, the wound of the artist and the bow of his art—are only overtures to the conflict between the superior individual and society that is his main subject. Very few people in the large audience that has profited from *Axel's Castle* reached the castle itself, the workshop of symbolism; no one can forget Proust locked up in the "Heartbreak House of capitalist culture." The Finland Station in Petrograd, 1917, was a

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symbol of the struggle of man to reach an appointed destiny in his modern determination to change the world. But if Lenin arrives at the station on time, it is without the emotion of the Revolution. Half-way through the book Mr. Wilson went sour on Marxism, and it is the romance of Marx that we remember, not his theory or the way millions of lives have been changed by it.

Mr. Wilson's subject is history, and in history the personal careers shape its meaning for him. His masterly study of Dickens in *The Wound and the Bow*, a far better short story than any in this book, was yet only a way of showing Dickens's fate in the social structure of England. In this book, too, his interest is in careers, not in lives. A career is a complete cycle, seen from the outside, which can present to a mind like Mr. Wilson's the dramatic episodes of a life. But a life is built up inductively, from the universal nouns of human experience; it is slow work, it is threadbare, it is fiction. Mr. Wilson is not really interested in fiction; only in using it to put a floor of imaginary detail under his historical commentary. The fact that he can employ the apparatus of fiction with technical brilliance does not contradict this point; it only makes it a sadder one. For Mr. Wilson is too imaginative a writer and too complex a personality, driven by too insistent a personal ache, as artists must be, to analyze events in their "objective" appearance merely. He is too involved in the cross-stimulation of man and his outward culture to escape the library; or rather, the cultural dream which so often is life for him. He has been an example of a kind of transverse talent which is common in France, where ideas become conscious forces. I have the greatest admiration for this talent, which is so much like Henry Adams's, and like Adams's, driven by a longing for excellence, true aristocracy, and a social home. But it is a talent whose roots have got a little twisted in Hecate County. For Mr. Wilson's view of history is now merely mordant. Lives are still closed to him; that is, he is still more interested in careers than in character. The historian prods the novelist; the novelist wants to break through the mask of history, but has long ago forgotten its exchange-value back into particular human terms. All experience is devaluated into symbols. Meanwhile, the man wants to tell us something direct about himself, and has made sure that he will not. The result is to reduce the book to a curiously covert kind of commentary.

Hecate is very congenial to Mr. Wilson's mind at present. "Where three roads meet, there is she standing." Tri-formed, bearing torches, a snake, a club, a key, etc., she represents the cross-roads and the phases of the moon. Light and darkness alternate through her. So that we see her and yet do not see her, as a man will struggle to see a figure in his dreams. "Hecate County" is clearly meant to be the landscape of a type of middle-class mind in this country. We see it in the acute period of the American crisis, between Hoover and Hitler. Around this region Mr.

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Wilson has traced the marks of the deepening world crisis and the challenge to the democratic and moralistic faith of the West by the totalitarian states. The narrator is the real hero; all its threads are in his hands. He has no name. He is a young art-critic, trained as an economist; his main interest is the history of painting "from a social point of view." His family is a cultivated one; his father is a financial expert for one of the big companies in Detroit. The father is a scholarly technician, in fact, who is of service to the management side of industry, but not of it. He is indifferent to its social drives. This background has a suggestive resemblance to Mr. Wilson's own, for he comes from a professional yet unmetropolitan background which gave him the sense of belonging to the pre-corporate side of American life and at the older, less frantically acquisitive, end of the American middle-class. Like Mr. Wilson, the narrator detests the new bourgeois culture of twentieth-century metropolitanism and feels he has transcended its values through an intellectual occupation. At the same time he cannot free himself of Hecate County, of the immediate frivolities of his immediate social group. Nor can he descend—despite his radical sympathies—to the working class.

The main subject of the book is the narrator's attempts to learn his true social allegiance despite "the prison of the social compartments." Its main action consists in his attempts to locate this allegiance in his relations with three women. There is Jo, his friendly and frivolous mistress half the year, whom he resigns himself to at the end as the symbol of his social imprisonment. Jo is the narrator's immediate social life, as he lives it between sensual pleasure and self-contempt among the cocktail set in Hecate County. When Jo is away, he finds himself simultaneously involved with Anna, a Brooklyn waitress and the daughter of disreputable immigrants, and Imogen, the romantically beautiful wife of an advertising-agency executive and a neighbor in Hecate County. Anna is the working-class, the immigrant underside of American life, the poor; the narrator is drawn to her strength, devotion and direct knowledge of life, but recoils at frequent intervals because of Imogen. She is the story-book past, the idealized memory, which represents the narrator's nostalgia, his vision of childhood in critical maturity. Hers is the world before Hecate County, and really before sex. Imogen is beautiful because she is essentially unpossessable, as the past is unrecoverable. She is also, as he learns long afterwards, neurotic rather than crippled, as she thinks she is. But her neurosis serves to keep her from any real personal risks and critical encounters, and represents the flaw in the past, its secret deceptions.

In this three-fold world the symbolic reference is very wide. The three women represent not only phases of the different societies to which the narrator is attracted in turn. They represent also periods in time to which the hero returns in dreams; not always sleeping dreams. These

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are interpolated with great technical skill by Mr. Wilson and furnish increased knowledge of the past—I should say *documentation*—and taken together symbolize the alternate and negotiable levels of consciousness on which we live. The principal conflict takes place in "The Princess With The Golden Hair," which is the only one of the six stories that is occasionally moving. But it is caught up so repetitiously on the narrator's rigid design of all its meanings that it loses the advantages it has gained by awakening the mind with symbols. Nothing emphasizes this so well as the now-famous fullness of Mr. Wilson's descriptions of fornication. These are really pathetic, and the shop girl I once saw blinking in the IRT at the rush-hour, leafing through Mr. Wilson's book in the hope, was really in for a disappointment. Lawrence at least idealized what is so misleadingly, in modern times, called the act of love. Mr. Wilson's narrator is so locked up in his own mind that he seems to have his encounters only for what he shall think of them. Nothing could be further removed from passion; or even from neurotic conquest; or even from mechanical lechery. These scenes are thoughts masquerading as acts, and are not even the similes of acts; and they are not thoughts but the waverings of a mind weighing its social loneliness and confusion. The sex act here is the cosmetic of a philosophy; and I do not know what I dislike more in these scenes—the fact that the narrator is such a worm or the clutter with which Mr. Wilson conceals his distance from human intimacy. Yet Anna, whom Mr. Wilson has tried so hard to document in all her esoteric lowliness that she lives near something called *The* King's Highway in Brooklyn, and amid an assortment of no-goods drawn from every imaginable Sudetenland in Brooklyn—Anna does come through, for the narrator wants so hard to reach her world that he brings her alive under the pressure of his real emotion.

In three stories, "The Man Who Shot Snapping Turtles," "Glimpses of Wilbur Flick," and "The Milhollands and Their Damned Soul," Mr. Wilson describes vicious, idle, and deliriously acquisitive sides of American life—the eccentric cruelties, the lack of standards, the scintillating phoniness. There are fine satiric strokes in them all, especially in the last, concerned with literary politicians. More important, after "The Princess With The Golden Hair," are "Ellen Terhune" and "Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn At Home." In both dream sequences are used; in the first to recreate the troubled life-cycle of a brilliant woman composer, which the narrator, very close to her in his alienation from their social class, does through uneery sequences of her early and middle life. It is characteristic of Mr. Wilson's talent, which has great underhand force, that the machinery for this recreation and the late nineteenth-century interiors among which Ellen Terhune's tragedy is imagined, should be so much more lucid than the figure of Ellen herself. It is not Ellen whom we get to know in easy human detail; it is the sense of time, and

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its cruel undertow forever dragging us back into the past we blame; of the pathos of the family and its genteel heartlessness. Ellen's suffering is vivid, but she has been created not for what she is, but for what she concentrates, to Mr. Wilson's imagination, in the facts of her class and her type of career.

In "Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn At Home" Mr. Wilson pulls off his last feat and really gives us some of his inner thoughts. "Ellen Terhune" is the story of the late twenties and of the new intelligentsia that sought fresh thought in Europe. The Blackburn story begins on Europe in America, the refugees, the American dragging into war, and already reading something of the struggle in the refugees. The narrator goes to a party at the house of a vaguely European man of all affairs called Blackburn. The episode falls into a dream, interpolated in such a way as to blend the distinctness of sleep and the stupor of awakening, the symbolic depth of dreams and the hesitant shallowness of consciousness. Blackburn begins a conversation with the narrator on art, and suddenly going off into French, reveals himself disconsolately as the Devil. He has turned to French because events have become so irrational that only the neatness and precision of French can put them in order. He indignantly describes the Soviet purges, the forthcoming horrors of the Nazi terror, and ascribes them to the decay of organized religion—that is, of the Catholic Church. Ever since the Reformation, he complains, the diminishing belief in sin, in the reality of any struggle between good and evil, has robbed him of his occupation. The new nihilism has dispensed with God—"my distinguished opponent"—and therefore with him. He now sees his last opportunity in America, where there remains some deposit of religion, of belief in sin, and therefore in him.

A hit, a hit: but where are we with it? Dostoevsky needed to believe in the Devil, and finally convinced himself that he did. Mr. Wilson's Devil is brilliant, and the whole episode is an instructive tour-de-force; but his handling of it is frivolous. A generation ago writers divulged intimate details of the body only to those who knew a little Latin—your cultivation was the admission of your respectability. Mr. Wilson has similarly confined his full loathing of Stalin's Russia to those who are also a little *deraciné*, like the Devil—the intellectuals without dogma, the homeless radicals; those who have paid, like Mr. Wilson, for their freedom of thought. But even from the point of view of the sympathetic reader, it is clear that the Devil serves only to dispose of Mr. Wilson's rather complicated irony and exasperation, since he cannot resolve them himself. The darkness of the moon over America in this story is very thick. What Mr. Wilson really feels like saying is, "The Devil take it!" And it is significant that the Devil is a European. Not the least of his uses here is to point up Mr. Wilson's disgust with Europe and to make a claim on America deeper than he makes out. It is not that he is Ber-

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nard DeVoto; his disappointment in America is profound, and its legendary "promise" in the West is bitingly satirized. But he is writing under the sign of darkness, and his narrator represents a social weariness, a poisonous neutrality between Anna's working-class life and Imogen's story-book past, that emphasizes the vacancy of his present. And emphasizes it in a world in which the old clerical serpents of absolute good and evil have suddenly come back; in the "Heartbreak House of Capitalist Culture," which is supposedly eternal. There is almost too much for Mr. Wilson to say at the end, for he says it all as an historical interpreter—that is, as a kind of journalist. And his misanthropy is so great that, in a curious last line, he tries to redeem it a little by saying, in effect, "Life and Time go on." But this excess of material, this disproportion of personal chagrin, are still only the marks of a novelist who has not *imagined* his material, but has used fiction to put his hostility on a different plane. Fiction, when it is done by the total imagination of the novelist, is never so unrelieved in its personal bitterness or so cluttered in its effects. It resides within its own economy. But as Mr. Wilson lacks the novelist's suspension of disbelief, the novelist's respect for experience, so he lacks the novelist's involuntary generosity. Like Melville in *The Confidence Man,* he can end his book only by sharply putting out the light. His book will live not because it is a work of imagination, but because it is a source-book in the sadness of Americans.

ALFRED KAZIN

RETURN TO THE U. S. A.

THE AIR-CONDITIONED NIGHTMARE. *By Henry Miller, New Directions.*

IF IT is stupid of a reviewer to refer to the dust jacket of a book in the course of his review, it is all the worse for him to launch his observations with an initial splash of such bad taste. But Henry Miller (and I personally think it is one of the best things about him) is on a perpetual holiday from taste, always inviting us to join him. Besides, the dust jacket of *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* is singularly appropriate, and says something about Miller in a way not said before.

It is a photograph. In the background stands a skyscraper, of white stone. Superimposed on the base of the skyscraper and occupying the foreground is a shanty—sharecropper's hovel or miner's hut, a decrepit thing. This is the portrait of America that first confronts us in Miller's transcontinental travelogue.

What has this photograph, reminiscent of a type of wordless social comment of the thirties, to do with Miller? With the Miller of overstatement and overwriting as principles-in-themselves, and the overflowing surrealist cocktail? Who f . . . ed himself clear of the world and called on us to stare in a desperately exalted trance of contemplation at the cracks between our toes?

The photographs of the thirties were meant to fill the empty spaces

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that mere words were supposed to have left in our consciousness. You saw their faces, and these became the bitter underscoring of the text. And then the text itself disappeared, sinking without trace into the hollow cheeks and eyes, the holes of the clap-board cabins. This was more or less the time that Miller pulled out for France. He has returned to pick up a state of consciousness and a habit of mind more or less where he left them.

Miller's America, his air-conditioned nightmare, is also a series of images, without text. He has already said all that he has to say; has caught the images, a few of them memorable, and has no more to catch. His own peculiar kind of comment, the comically over-done, and perhaps seriously under-felt, indignation, is already a dated and vacated thing; and the images that stood out in it have been taken over by the photographic slicks, either tamed and spruced up, or outdone in savagery in the weekly spreads of *Life*. America of the glaring contrasts, of riches and poverty and tons of food wasted has become a household notion. The American nightmare has taken the place of the American dream, and it is as sentimental as its predecessor, as popular and as widely believed in. We all know our shame and our disgrace by now; they have blended with the breakfast coffee. Miller is in the position once ascribed, if I remember, by Mencken to George Bernard Shaw—parading, stripped to the waist, with a placard that reads: Man is a Mammal and

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has an Umbilicus!

There is, nevertheless, an element of novelty in Miller's nightmare—novelty, that is, as far as the average American bad dream is concerned. He makes his protest from the standpoint of the artist and bohemian, whose sufferings are ignored in the popular version of our *cauchemar.* It is a serious indictment (better expressed in his *New Republic* letters and *Plight of the Creative Artist in the U.S.A.*) and there is much truth in it. But it is the truth of the self-sufficient man, a little smug in his righteousness, who doesn't have to take account of more than *he* already knows. He is at once spokesman and poseur ("I prefer corduroys"); he is honest while he fakes and a faker in his honesty, and has not been able to resist playing the lion to all the woolly cubs, and creating a cult with each angry swish of his tail. Perhaps the greatest homage one can pay him is not to take him too seriously.

The limitations of bohemianism are all too obvious. (Miller himself may be aware of some of them—*vide The Colossus of Maroussi.* Or was that the supreme bohemian effort, the gesture at faith?) He has nothing to say of American society and politics that his pose and his gesture have not already summarized. Anything not fully covered by his pose is included in his prayer for the immediate destruction of civilization—a device whereby silence can be made to say everything.

But despite the persistence of his bohemian grimace, Miller shows signs of softening up. He has heart-to-heart talks with convicts, painters, children, desert rats, automobile mechanics, etc. (spoiling some of these passages, as he frequently spoils the best of his pieces, by running off a surrealist coda, or indulging himself in the delight of the obvious moral he has drawn). His conversations, and his witty or whimsical moods, when he forgets about his toothsome snarl and lets himself go, are better than what one expects of travel-talk, and there are some occasional pages of the simple, lively prose that he does so very well. Miller, you sometimes begin to feel, is really the homey sort.

It may be the onset of age, or in some way the effect of America, but Miller back-at-home is not the same old Henry. The image he created for himself, among the despairing ecstasies of *Tropic of Cancer,* of a man, flashlight in hand, peering down a vagina, is hard to connect with the motorist peering through a windshield. It may be because America is everything he says it is, the very same sterile horror (how else account for the Miller cults?) that his indictment bears no weight. He falls so readily into the American stride, the tricky, self-advertising gait, that he becomes merely a conscious citizen, disgusted by his society, but by no means dissociated from it. Miller, the decultured man, can thrive only on the ruins of ancient cultures. Without traditional or classic setting, his pose is no more than another American eccentricity.

ISAAC ROSENFELD

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FICTION CHRONICLE

BERNARD CLARE. *By James T. Farrell. Vanguard.* $2.75.
A HOUSE IN THE UPLANDS. *By Erskine Caldwell. Duell, Sloan & Pearce.* $2.50.
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RILKE WROTE, "Art too is only a way of living, and, however one lives, one can, unwittingly, prepare oneself for it . . . " History recklessly disavows attempts to set up any system of education, training or temperament as necessary to the emergence of an artist and affirms that art can arise from and be nourished by almost any conceivable circumstances, whether personal or environmental. However, it doesn't seem too incautious to suggest that the group of experiences and the temperament described by James T. Farrell in his new novel *Bernard Clare* seem very unlikely to produce significant artistic creations. In this biography of a young man from Chicago who comes to New York in the 20's to make his way as a writer, Mr. Farrell has not at any point felt obliged to give his literary hero, Bernard Clare, spiritual or intellectual boldness, delicacy of response, individuality of observation, or profundity of dedication—any of the traits that might make the reader believe the character has at least a potential capacity for the difficult creative task he has chosen. Even Bernard's bare ambition to literature is expressed over and over in such savage prose as, "God, he wanted to write! Christ, he wanted to have talent! Jesus Christ, he wanted to use the pen!" The young man's past contains the familiar pities, expected rebellions, and commonplace dreams that make, in our literature, the portrait of an unhappy American. Born in a lower-class Chicago environment, he rejects the Catholic Church, abandons his unsympathetic family, yearns for freedom, confidence, and a fruitful life. In New York Bernard Clare is free but handicapped by inadequate experience, eager but bedeviled by emotional and financial lacks.

The story then falls into the typical Farrell pattern: Bernard gets drunk, lives in hopeless shabbiness, takes several boring jobs, experiences extreme girl-hunger, finally gets a girl only to have his love compromised by its sordid surroundings just as the girl's soul is compromised by her economic dependency upon her husband. In addition, the hero finds the opportunity and demand for several fist fights, the occasion to deliver many well-meaning but painstakingly obvious opinions on time, memory,

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sex, and human injustice. One would like to think Mr. Farrell always deliberate in his naïveté and to assume that the novel's heavy-handed romanticism, the incredible carelessness, were aspects of a satiric picture of the follies of a literary youth. That complete charity is impossible, however, because of the seriousness with which the author approaches his character. The ending seems to imply that Bernard Clare has been magically matured by his bouts with life and is ready to become a writer, a prognosis not at all indicated by our knowledge of his condition.

And yet as one reads along in this novel it begins to have an ironic validity doubtless not intended. Bernard Clare's history, if it does not hold out the promise of literary fulfillment, exposes the roots of the ultimate failure of many of our novelists now in the prime of their creative life, a failure that makes us await their work with little enthusiasm or hope. If this story is a portrait of the artist as a young man, then Farrell's artist has sensation without intellect, honesty without subtlety, energy without discrimination. But this view of an American literary man is not the work of a youth; it is the work of an established writer. Suffice it to say that in the lazy clumsiness of the style, the banality of the incident, the poverty of the insight, *Bernard Clare* would be more appropriate as the hero's first fumbling effort than as James T. Farrell's eighteenth or so published book. The old artificer has not stood this author in good stead.

Erskine Caldwell also has more than a score of publications to list on the back of book jackets, but the relentless crudity of his new work, *A House in the Uplands,* will astonish no one who has followed the fall of Mr. Caldwell from heights never breathtaking into the pit in which he has been trapped for so many years. This mercilessly fatuous story of Grady Dunbar, a plantation owner in an already well-documented state of agrarian decay, and his wife, Lucyanne, paradoxically defies comment because it is presented with an unrelieved ineptitude that makes judgment rather beside the point. One does not think about a book of this sort that it might have been done better or differently, but only that it shouldn't have been done at all. Infinitely slothful, since nothing of the slightest difficulty has been ventured, that which emerges has not even been given the kind of solicitude, whether futile or otherwise, we expect from the very slightest of writers. Consequently the novel, brief as it is, strikes one as padded word by word, sentence by sentence, until it reached its final unenviable state. The framework of the story—the great house now dilapidated, the arrogant son of a once respectable family, the beautiful octoroon leading her lascivious life back in the servants' quarters, the guitar strumming through the night— gives a good idea of this anesthetized novel in which neither black nor white, poor nor rich, the evil nor the good, ever awaken.

A first novel by Eleanor Clark, *The Bitter Box,* has in abundance

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what the books by Farrell and Caldwell lack. It is conceived with a superior daring, executed with polish and subtlety, and, unlike so much scrupulously well-written fiction by American women, concerned with an adventurous and pertinent contemporary theme. In this parable of Mr. Temple, an obscure bank clerk who walks out of his teller's cage on a fine spring day and wanders into the Communist Party, we have a situation rich in humor and pathos, half-hallucinated and yet always alive with meanings. Mr. Temple, at the beginning of his history, is a robot, a mechanical man whose life is built upon so many paralyzing decorums and evasions that he is more a corpse than anything else. The choice of this profoundly inexperienced man as a mirror to reflect the turbulence, vivacity, and irresponsibility of the Stalinist heyday is in many ways strikingly advantageous; more so, one is inclined to think, than a worldly, articulate hero would have been. Leaving the bank and setting out upon his compulsive wanderings, Mr. Temple meets Hilda Brand, the wife of a party intellectual whom he had known as a shoestring bank depositor. Mr. Temple is drawn to the warmth and beauty of Hilda and to the restaurant in which she works and, ultimately, into the radical movement of which Hilda and her husband are a part. Like a somnambulist, Mr. Temple begins to distribute the party paper, to try to read Marx, and to do his bit for the revolution by contributing

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his savings and, finally, by stealing from the bank. Just as he is beginning to feel himself a part of the circle, Hilda is expelled as a *bourgeois,* a particularly touching event since she, above all the other characters in the book, displays the anxious insecurity, the almost heroic fatigue, and the hopelessly vague plans that would mark the proletarian situation. From that point onward, as he becomes engulfed in the contretemps that accompanied the great change in the party line, Mr. Temple's adventures are rightly chaotic.

Eleanor Clark's greatest gift is for symbolic incident and detail. For instance, a chance happening upon a shooting gallery can manage better than pages of documentary fiction to indicate the undercurrent of actual violence in the situation to which Mr. Temple and the party members have submitted. Also, exquisite humor is derived from Mr. Temple's mere use of phrases like *lumpenproletariat* and *historical juncture.* In the sections that deal with the Communists, Miss Clark manages brilliantly to give life to the parades, the magazine sellers, the fights with the revolutionary opposition, the clichés, and, above all, to catch the simple-minded but appealing gaiety of characters like Jackie and Bo, two energetic lesbians. The author's knowledge of the speech, the clothes, the bohemian abandon is always accurate and at least one character, Comrade Rose, who has a brief but hilarious affair with Mr. Temple, seems quite perfect. The comic aspects of the novel are most interesting, perhaps because current fiction is so lacking in humor and irony; but no slight is meant to the essential seriousness of the material. If we find Mr. Temple ruined in the end, we also know that he has been brought to life by his collision with the inaccurate, disorderly, but all too human party machinery. He has been made homeless, hungry, and friendless by the loss of his old routine, but he is no longer either actually or symbolically in his cage. In that sense the book is a somewhat relevant answer to those people who pride themselves upon never having taken an interest in politics simply because, by their apathy, they were spared disillusionment.

In spite of the numerous felicities of *The Bitter Box,* it seems necessary to state that it is riddled with difficulties and that many of the author's most rewarding observations and inventions are hidden in dream-like sequences from which they do not readily emerge. There is frequently a kind of surrealist distortion of setting and often we literally don't know where we are. One scene, apparently in a movie, is described in terms of shifting colors, geometric designs, and abstract patterns that defy elucidation. In addition, Mr. Temple is pursued throughout the story by a malicious man with a scar who is identified only by his Christian name, John, which happens to be the same as Mr. Temple's. There are times when this character seems to exist only in Mr. Temple's imagination; or again, because of the similar name, we think he is per-

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haps the hero's alter ego, a symbolic representation of the possible malevolence Mr. Temple has concealed by his mild manner. In the end the man is identified as a party thug who gets liquidated after his evil work was done, but one gathers by the way in which he has been presented that he was supposed to mean more than that. Also, Mr. Temple occasionally does things that seem out of character, such as inflicting wounds upon himself when he has violated his puritan discipline. This device which serves Gide's Lafcadio well did not convince me as a possibility for Mr. Temple. However, it must be said for Eleanor Clark's ambiguities that one is never tempted to think she meant nothing in these inexplicable passages, but is instead baffled by the fact that her situations have infinite meanings. And that seems to me a tribute even to the difficulties in this enterprising work.

Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, though both are young, are at critical points in their careers. They have received publicity, fond attentions, and friendly gestures from all levels in the literary hierarchy, and yet, in as much as one can predict from their current books, there are signs that the creative arteries are beginning to harden. Both of these novels seem to me literally gasping for breath. Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* is set in the early 1920's, but it contains nothing of the cynicism or anxiety that have characterized novels of and about that period. Miss Welty's mind and aspirations seem closer, in this novel, to Thomas Nelson Page than to anyone else. (However, Mr. Hamilton Basso in *The New Yorker* saw fit to use the name of Gogol several times.) *Delta Wedding* is squirearchy literature, done without the slightest self-consciousness and, evidently, without any restraining acknowledgment of the personal, social, and historical exigencies that confronted this unhappy class. In its picture of the Fairchild family, Delta cotton planters, caught in the pleasant preparations for the wedding of the young daughter, Dabney Fairchild, this novel would seem to be the answer to those commentators who want literature about "normal" people, that is about those whose optimism is unshakeable and who accept themselves without irony. The author apparently meant to show what is called a "good way of life" and her desire, noble, serene and hopeful as it is, would be entirely commendable if it were not for the fact that we can't believe her picture of life without a determined abandonment of our knowledge and experience. Unfortunately we all know failure better than success, disappointment more intimately than happiness, and literature about the luckless human condition is likely to be more persuasive than any other.

There is very little plot in *Delta Wedding;* its intent is largely descriptive. The natural world—moonvine, verbena, Cape jessamine—provides the decor for the family; a staggering abundance of snap beans, watermelon, turnip greens, fudge and drumsticks takes up most of the characters' time. As the dramatic opening of one section we have the

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line, "When Laura looked at her plate, the gizzard was gone." This is not quoted frivolously; indeed, it is rather typical of the kind of climax the book strives for. Hair ribbons, mosquito netting, filmy dresses are approached with an unaccountable awe and delight. There is considerable charm in the book, but not a trace of wit or even a great deal of humor. Eudora Welty's extravagantly admired prose has, since she abandoned the grotesque, become unbearably girlish. The Fairchilds walk over "the little iron steps" or "the little bayou bridge" and the girls throw a "little coat of peach silk" over their shoulders. Nothing escapes this genteel euphoria and even the male characters have a rough and tumble sweetness that is often disconcerting. At one point Miss Welty threatens to introduce, in Uncle George, the beloved hero of Southern fiction, the hard, masculine, sensual but sensitive male; but even he is emasculated by the Fairchild lemonade and his sense of destiny vanishes like smoke into the great Delta sky. Eudora Welty has perhaps been a bit overeager to avoid the tiresome and repetitious propagandism of most contemporary Southern fiction. At the moment she is much too far above the battle.

The Member of the Wedding is a sketchy little book about the sufferings and loneliness of a twelve year old girl. In the androgynous heroine, Frankie, Carson McCullers has done little more than repeat her picture of adolescent life in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Again we have

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the homely, barefoot girl in blue jeans whose soul, however, is as fastidious as an angel's. With the somewhat embarrassing refrain, "they are the we of me," Frankie tries to overcome her isolation by identifying herself with her brother's wedding. Where Miss Welty uses the traditional rural setting, Carson McCullers delights in an equally familiar Southern small town background, particularly in cafes, juke box joints, and freak shows. By now the scenic effects in Southern fiction are beginning to have no more vitality or originality than calendar art. What is needed is not the abandonment of this fine feeling for locale, but a fresh use of it; the Southern scene is not so much exhausted as hopelessly stylized. Carson McCullers has a worthy sense of humor and a rich gift for characterization. These two qualities give *The Member of the Wedding* a certain amount of appeal, but they cannot make it any more than a very elementary exercise.

Bernard, the fourteen year old narrator in Isaac Rosenfeld's *Passage from Home,* seems rather sluggish by comparison with the striking sensibility of the usual adolescent character in fiction. One suspects this may be due to the fact that the adult world, rather than a whimsical and exclusively childish world, impinges upon him with more seriousness and urgency than is ordinarily the case. In this novel it is not the meticulous recapitulation of early experience that is significant, but that the experiences recounted involve the boy in his first importunate choice between different ways of life. On the one hand Bernard has his robust, but unworldly, middle-class Chicago family, and on the other he has in his aunt, a modern, rebellious woman, the symbol of independence and personality. When he discovers that his aunt's life is empty and unhealthy, her independence imaginary, her personality thin and rather cold, he is more or less shocked into maturity and into a recognition of his own needs and spirit which can be satisfied neither by conventional Jewish family life or by self-conscious, destructive modernism. *Passage from Home* is creditably written, but it lacks vigor and fictional inspiration and seems more the act of an intelligent will than of a compelling imagination. Unfortunately the subject matter and the youth of the central character make it impossible for us to have more than a hint here and there of Isaac Rosenfeld's intellectual gifts. They are of the sort that may, if he finds the right theme to utilize them, make him an exciting writer.

The Snake Pit by Mary Jane Ward has the distinction of making a nervous breakdown a rather jolly affair. It is actually a light book about insanity, written in a tediously coy and gagged-up style. This novel has been energetically praised for the author's good taste in not attempting to indicate causes for the central character's mental relapse. I take these encomiums to represent an underhanded repudiation of Freud, a trium-

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phant approval of the denial of inscrutable, humiliating complexes. And everything is made so much more reassuring for us by our recognition that the work is obviously done from the *inside,* by one who knows, and not by a mere novelist. In the end, the victim, back in the arms of a prodigiously loving husband, is on her way to a suspicious recovery and both the patient and the psychiatrist seem to agree that the unfortunate woman was just "tired." In view of the fact that Miss Ward has publicly admitted her book to be autobiographical and in the light of the censorship and optimism that make it valueless, I should say, quite seriously, that the author is much too close to her material. She has everywhere shunned the kind of analysis that would make such a book illuminating.

ELIZABETH HARDWICK

MAN WITHOUT SUPER-EGO

ART AND SOCIAL NATURE. *By Paul Goodman. Vinco Publishing Company.*

THE BEST comment on Paul Goodman has been made by Goodman himself in PARTISAN REVIEW, February 1941. When a reader expressed puzzlement at Goodman's claim to be at once an Aristotelian, Marxist, and Kantian (Freud and Rousseau have since been added to the list), Goodman replied:

> "I can assure you that any contradictions among them have managed to thrive in my own head without the least pause to my animal spirits."

This is so aptly put that further criticism seems almost superogatory. I see no reason for not taking Goodman at his word: indeed nothing could bring the least pause to his animal spirits. Since, however, the intelligence is concerned at contradictions, we may also take it that Goodman's "ideas" (he is never, in fact, at a loss for any) are the product of these indefatigable animal spirits, and without any discoverable connection with the intelligence. Freud long ago showed that contradictions mean nothing to the id.

Goodman's latest intellectual contribution is on the subject of sexual emancipation. To be sure, sexual emancipation is not a new cause, but Goodman's novelty is to have married it to the social revolution and advanced a positive program of action. If we systematically introduce children to sexual experience, he tells us, we shall get the revolution. Of course, no bold experimental program can be refuted *a priori,* but it does seem to me that there are some difficulties here: Stalin, for example, is not a child, and I do not know that there are any children on the board of directors of General Motors, U.S. Steel, or the Chase National Bank. But Goodman may have in mind a gradual and longterm program: if we introduce to sexual practices the children of capitalists

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and bureaucrats in this generation, they will become such liberated beings as to give up their class-privileges when they come to maturity in the next generation. But this, I submit, is mere sexual Fabianism; and as a desertion of revolutionary "purity," it would have to be characterized—if I may be permitted to borrow the terms of Dwight Macdonald—as "progressive" rather than "radical."

Goodman's imagination seems to swarm with notions of such exotic unions: he would also marry Rousseau to Freud. It would be difficult to find a more incompatible pair, since Freud is the last man to be saddled with a belief in a state of primal innocence and in a human nature intrinsically good; he has some very disparaging comments on human nature on the instinctual level, as well as some remarks on the necessity of repressions—which Goodman might look into. "Where id was, there shall ego be," Freud says! which Goodman slightly revises to: "Where ego is, there shall id be."

But if Goodman has misread Freud, Freud has already read him correctly: on several occasions Freud expressed concern that his theory, because of the prominence given to sex, would be debased and sensationalized by intellectual adventurers and playboys.

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Correspondence

Disagreement on Patchen

Sirs:

As a sometime champion of PARTISAN REVIEW, I am mightily disturbed by the fatuous and uncalled for review of Kenneth Patchen's *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer,* which appears in your Winter, 1946 issue. Surely the editors cannot excuse this by saying that the "views of the writers do not necessarily correspond with those," etc.

It is high time that a grossly neglected American writer whose integrity and literary ability are of enormous consequence in this age of self-indulgent cynicism, commercial morbidity and smirking hypocrisy should be championed by the only remaining forces who avowedly have no materialistic stakes in prolonging the evil of our times. To be leftist in a political sense loses all validity when conventional cultural norms are embraced.

Miss Hardwick's sarcastic definition of Patchen as a professional literary rebel is a snide crack which would appear to backfire. Certainly he is a literary rebel, and if Miss Hardwick is unable to see more in his immense satire on this country's cultural and moral bigotry than shades of Joyce, then perhaps she would do well to do her reading a good deal more carefully and at a maturer age. That Kenneth Patchen makes a very meagre living from the sale of his unballyhooed books is true; if that is what she means by calling him professional then let her say so. But let her point out that unlike the big name boys in the field, Patchen does not sell his integrity to sustain himself.

If this is the best that America's most important cultural magazine can do, then perhaps it is time to withdraw our support completely. Better to have total lies to combat than mocking half-truths.

Very truly yours,

New York, N. Y. HOLLY BEYE

REPLY: *I disagree with the writer of the above letter about Kenneth Patchen's ability, but I am in complete accord on the matter of his integrity, if I may allow that word to mean that he is faithful to his perceptions and to himself. However, in my opinion, Mr. Patchen's zealously guarded selfhood is dull and pretentious and his perceptions are of a commonplace order. I called him a professional literary rebel because his numerous unorthodoxies seem to me quite gratuitous, the mere trademarks of a professional nonconformity, while the actual content of his work continues to be without any of those qualities of mind and imagination that would mark an original and revolutionary talent. Also, I am not surprised to learn from my correspondent that Mr. Patchen is poor—an unfortunate condition he shares with a great many people; but even if it could be proved that all good writers are financially poor, it still would not follow that all poor writers are good.*

ELIZABETH HARDWICK

Good News

Sirs:

After reading your excellent French number, I could not help wondering why you rarely publish articles on literary items from the Spanish-speaking world. It may interest you to know that among Spanish-American intellectuals PARTISAN REVIEW is most widely read of American magazines and is considered the best literary journal in the English language; it was a rare conversation in which some reference to the PARTISAN didn't come up. I

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have no idea whether subscriptions bear out this impression of mine, but I do know that in Lima copies circulated until they literally fell apart.

Yours sincerely,
Boston, Mass. EDITH HELMAN

Sirs:

I take this opportunity in adding my small applauding voice to the many who see in your magazine the vigorous and honest criticism so unique and yet so needed in these bad days. I've been reading the P.R. for quite a long time now and await its periodic arrival with ever increasing eagerness. Even more indicative of the popularity your magazine has in this neck of the woods is the fact that there is always a waiting list itching to lay hands on my copy (or my neck).

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